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"YOU ARE NOT CHANGED," SAID A VOICE NEAR VERA. "I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN YOU ANYWHERE."

VERA'S KINGDOM.

[NOVELETTE]
(CONCLUDED)

CHAPTER V.

IT was early spring, London was filling rapidly. The season was a gay one, and among the many beautiful girls who curtsied to the King and Queen at the March Drawing-room not one was so lovely, not one moved with such perfect grace as the Lady Vera Noel Eastcourt, only child and heiress of his Grace the Duke of Dornford. Royal lips themselves deigned to speak in praise of her surpassing charms, and the lovely inmate of Sycamore Cottage, the child Mrs. Rutherford

had so often chided, was the beauty of Belgravia.

The Duke fairly worshipped his daughter. The legal formalities necessary to establish her rights were complied with as quickly as possible, and then he took her abroad. He was a very proud man; he would not have it known in Yorkshire that the minister of Sandstone had for twenty years been his daughter's sole guardian. He lavished handsome presents at Sycamore Cottage, but he would not let the astounding history of Vera's greatness form a subject of gossip among the congregation.

All that Sandstone in general knew was that Mrs. Rutherford's niece had gone to London to study art.

For fifteen months the Duke and his new-found child travelled on the Continent, visiting every spot worth seeing; then they came home to England, bringing in their train the Hon.

Oscar Eastcourt, who must one day be Duke of Dornford, since the grand old title could not descend in the female line.

Mr. Eastcourt would inherit a very modest revenue, for most of his cousin's property was personal, and as such would descend to Vera, but the young man troubled himself little on that account. He was an aesthetic of a very pronounced type; so that he had enough to grow endless sunflowers, and to furnish his home in the most utterly-utter style, he was quite content.

He was a good man, a very good man, but most intensely proud. All the Eastcourts were that, but Oscar in pride of birth secreted a wonderful belief in himself as an apostle of taste.

The Duke admired him, but did not cordially like him; nevertheless, from the moment of his finding his child it was his darling wish

that Vera should become Oscar's wife, and one day wear the strawberry leaves which had but just escaped her mother's brow.

Mr. Eastcourt gave no sign of his own wishes. He spent most of his time with the Duke, and was Lady Vera's escort at all public places. He possessed a small estate of his own, and was full of plans for improving it.

A little cold and methodical, perhaps, with nothing of enthusiasm or passion about him, but yet a good, well-meaning man. Such was the suitor Vera was asked to substitute for the man who had loved her rashly, madly, to his own sorrow and hers, whose heart he had told her once was hers for all time.

"You like Oscar, I hope?" said the Duke, anxiously, when Vera's presentation was a thing of the past, and the young heiress was fairly launched on the great sea of London life.

"Oh, yes; he is very amusing."

"Amusing! My dear Vera, I should never have called him that. He's a first-rate fellow at heart, but I find him decidedly stupid."

Vera smiled.

"He amuses me."

"Perhaps you sympathise with him in his endless theories?"

"I laugh at them."

"That is unkind."

"How can I help it when he talks of giving each of his tenants a packet of sunflower seed instead of a Christmas pudding?"

"I don't think the tenants would laugh, Vera. His pocket would gain."

"No, because peacock's feathers are to accompany the seed. I can't rise quite to Oscar's theory, but I believe he thinks if all the world had beautiful homes there would be no more sin and misery."

"What about poverty?"

"He looks at that as a disease."

"Well, so that you understand each other, I'm not going to complain, but remember Vera, when you're married I'm not going to have you turned into a feminine reformer. Oscar's schemes are good enough, but, like most reformers, he carries theories to excess, and I'll not have you worried."

"You talk as if Oscar and I were engaged," she said, slowly.

"My dear Vera, I hope you will be; in fact, I can't understand what you are waiting for! Every day I expect to hear he has proposed."

"Are you so eager to get rid of me, father?"

"No, child, I should like to keep you always."

"And I am well content to be kept."

"I would not be so selfish. I fell in love with your mother at first sight. We were engaged after six weeks' acquaintance. You and Oscar have been together nearly fifteen months, and yet you haven't settled things."

"I don't want to be married, father."

"Why not?"

"I don't know."

"Surely you don't think it wrong. Your Aunt Maria disapproves of a great many things, but as she is married herself I don't think she can have warned you that marriage is a sinful institution."

"Oh, no!"

"Then what is it, Vera?"

"I am very happy as I am."

"You are two-and-twenty, dear, and you have had more offers than I can count. Is there one of your admirers you would have preferred to Oscar? I want you to choose for yourself, but you have always seemed eager to reject the proposals."

"I have never had a proposal in my life that I wished to accept, father."

Nor had she. The one man by whose side she would have liked to spend her life had never proposed to her, never even given her ground to think he meant to.

It was a year, and a-half turned since she had seen him during all those weary months she had never heard his name or spoken it, and yet her love was as fresh and warm as

the night when she first entered London at his side.

"There are some people just come up I want to show attention to, Vera—the Delavals. Ask them to lunch on Tuesday—Mrs. and Miss. Delaval is at the ends of the world on business."

"Are they nice?"

"Julia Delaval is charming. I don't care particularly for her sister-in-law, but we can hardly leave her out."

There was no escape for it. Lady Vera must receive her father's guests, must meet in her own character the two women she most feared; she could trust Julia she felt certain. Miss Delaval she knew intuitively was to be dreaded, but then she knew nothing of that nocturnal journey; it was only her suspicions that might be awakened.

And through all her nervousness she was glad to meet Julia Delaval again. After all she was his cousin; from her Vera might hear the news she had yearned for through all these weary months. It seemed like a link of her past life when she rose to receive her guests.

The simplicity of Vera's dress was a proverb, but on this June morning she had forsaken her usual custom; she wore a Parisian toilet puffed and frilled in the latest fashion, its whiteness relieved by knots of pale blue ribbon.

Surely there must be a difference between this elegantly attired lady doing the honours of her father's house and the little weary figure in grey to whom Mrs. Delaval had once given a shelter.

Vera knew this first visit must determine her future course; whatever part she adopted now she must keep to in the future. Should she greet Mrs. Delaval as an old acquaintance, and speak of the night spent under her roof, or should Lady Vera Eastcourt ignore the doings of Miss Milton? Hurriedly, Vera decided on the latter conduct.

The Delavals had no need to complain of their reception. They were treated as honoured guests.

The Duke took Julia under his care for amusement, and left Rosa to his daughter—rather an unfortunate arrangement, as it proved.

"Lady Vera, you remind me of someone I met a year ago. I could have declared it was her. I am sure if I had seen you in the street I should have gone up and addressed you as Miss Milton."

"Resemblances are strange things."

"Very!" pointedly. "And the oddest part of it is that Miss Milton had your name—Vera!"

Vera hurriedly drank a glass of water, and then adroitly changed the subject.

With Julia and the Duke things went more pleasantly. When she congratulated him on the recovery of his daughter he told her Vera had spent her childhood under the care of her mother's relations, and only joined him eighteen months since.

"She is very beautiful!"

"And as good as she is pretty; her lonely life has not hurt her, only—"

"Only!"

"It has left her without any real friends of her own age. Girls generally have heaps of intimates; she positively has none. The one companion of her youth is married, and residing also abroad. Now, Mrs. Delaval, I want you to be kind and sisterly to my little girl."

"An old married woman like me?"

"You are only twenty-four, and Vera's but two years your junior."

"Twenty-two! I should never have guessed it; and she is to marry Mr. Eastcourt!"

"It is not quite settled."

The Duke skillfully inveigled Rosa to look at his pictures after lunch. Julia and Lady Vera were left alone. Mrs. Delaval went up to the heiress and kissed her.

"I see you must keep the past a secret, and you may not speak my silence. I

thought you would feel more at home with me if I told you this."

"Thank you," with a little kindly smile. "Then you recognised me?"

"Of course—one does not see two such faces; and then the name Vera is uncommon."

"Do you think your sister—"

"Rosa knows nothing from me; once or twice after that night she used to question me about my 'friend Miss Milton'; but it is months now since she has mentioned the name."

"I am so glad."

"And you are happy?"

"I suppose so."

"What an answer! Well, you ought to be happy; the Duke worships you."

"He is goodness itself to me."

"And you are the richest woman in London."

"I don't want to be."

"Don't you? But money is very useful, dear."

"Love is better."

"But one can't have everything." Then, suddenly, and looking steadily into Vera's face, "And so you are going to marry Mr. Eastcourt?"

"We are not engaged."

"But you will be. He is an excellent young man, and will make a model husband!"

"I hate excellent young men!"

Julia turned round and whispered something in her ear.

"Haven't you got over that?"

"There was nothing to get over."

"Was there not?"

"Nothing; we were—friends!"

"Friends only! Then I may tell you the news; it only came last mail, and it set me thinking. Hugh Dugdale is going to be married!"

It was the first time she had heard that name for months; the sound of it was as sweetest music to her ear. Then came the few words that were her doom.

Vera never knew how many hopes she had built upon his return—never realised why she had kept Oscar Eastcourt so long in suspense until that morning.

"Hugh Dugdale is going to be married."

You might have heard a pin drop in the silence that followed. Julia was not heartless. She could pity the girl's wounded love, and she looked resolutely on the ground that she might not seem to be watching the changes in Vera's face.

The beauty of Belgravia was pale as the lily maid of Tennyson's poem, when at last she found her voice.

"Going to be married? That is great news!"

She spoke as though her comment followed close on the announcement, whereas more than five minutes divided them; but Mrs. Delaval never showed she noticed it. She went on quietly talking, just for the sake of giving Vera time to recover herself.

"We were very much surprised, for he never seemed a marrying man. My husband says he is sure to sell out now and come home."

Come home! Come home, and meet Vera in the gay world of fashion, with a wife at his side! Amuse his bride, perhaps, with the story of that nocturnal journey from Scarborough to London! Well, at least he should not find her wearing the willow for him; she would be married first.

"I think we must be going," said Mrs. Delaval, as she heard her sister and the Duke returning. "Dear Lady Vera, will you let me be something more to you than a mere acquaintance? I have known your father ever since I was a little child, and it would make me very happy to call you my friend."

Vera stammered out her thanks. When the Duke returned from escorting the ladies to their carriage he found his daughter on the ground in a dead faint.

Of course, the family physician was sent for at once, and he looked graver than his wont, spoke of a delicate organisation, and the dangerous effects of late hours and excitement.

The Duke, half beside himself with anxiety,



telegraphed for Dr. Stuart, and hung on his words as though they had been those of an oracle.

"Duke," said the country practitioner, gravely, "your grace, I can do nothing. Lady Vera needs neither physic nor drugs."

"But what am I to do?"

"Take her to the country, and let her lead a simple life, such as she was used to in her childhood. I told the Rutherfords once they did not let her have enough pleasure. I wonder if you would be offended at my saying you have given her too much?"

So they went down to Dornford Towers—the Duke, his darling, the Honourable Oscar Eastcourt, and the kind, intelligent lady who acted as Vera's companion and chaperon.

The Towers was in Sussex, and so there was nothing to remind Vera of a June two years ago when, walking by the waters of the great North Sea, she had met the man who for all time was to be her hero.

Dornford was a pretty little place, rather tame to those used to the rugged scenery of the North, but withal as rural and countrified a place as could be found within fifty miles of London.

CHAPTER VI.

And Lady Vera improved—at least they said so. A faint tinge of colour came back to her cheeks; she went about her usual vocations, and no one, unless it was Mrs. Carlyon, noticed that the heart seemed to have gone out of her smile, the joyousness from her voice.

She wandered into the library one day and took up an Army List; she studied it carefully, and later on read the military intelligence in the Gazette. Then she knew the worst. Captain Dugdale, of the —th Regiment, had indeed sent in his papers, his resignation had been accepted, and he was on his way home.

Vera closed the page with a sigh.

The same evening she was sitting in her boudoir when the door opened gently, and Oscar came slowly in. One glance at his face, and she knew the errand on which he had come. Often before she had guessed his wishes and fancied them, now she did not trouble to stave off his proposal. Better anything than that the one man she loved should have the power to tell his cherished bride that she was wearing the willow for his sake.

Oscar Eastcourt was five-and-thirty. Perhaps he had exhausted the fire and passion of youth; perhaps he really had no heart for anything apart from his æsthetic doctrines. He knew that he must marry; his future honours rendered it needful; a wife was incumbent on one, and she must be beautiful, graceful, and of high birth.

Vera fulfilled all these conditions; as for negatives she must not have a strong will, a decided fault, or, above all things, a mission of her own.

Vera had none of these. She loved the dull shades affected by the party to which Oscar belonged; she cared so little what she wore that she would doubtless submit to her husband's suggestions, and she tolerated, and even wildly admired, the peacock feathers and sun-flowers which Oscar worshipped.

Her appearance, too, was quite in keeping with the new furniture of the prophet's house. Dress her in a limp silk of high-art green with a girdle of terra-cotta, unbind her hair and let it hang in ripples to her waist, and she would be an ideal queen for an æsthetic home.

Not being in love Oscar had no fears as to his answer. He never even dreamed that Lady Vera would decline the high position he offered her as prophetess of his sublime creed; he knew her father's heart was set on the match. Among the host of men who thronged her footsteps he could discern no successful rival, and he felt almost as sure of marrying the Duke of Dornford's daughter as he did later on of inheriting his Grace's title and estates.

"I am very glad to find you alone," he began, rather loftily. "I have a subject of

great importance to speak to you about, and I regret to say hitherto all my attempts to gain a tête-à-tête with you have failed."

Vera held in her hand a pure white-lily. It seemed a fit emblem of herself.

Oscar decided that lilies rivalled sunflowers; and then, as she did not speak, he went on with his discourse.

"It must have struck you, Vera, that I spend a great deal of time with your father, as much, indeed, as I can spare from the Cause?"

He always spoke that last word with a peculiar emphasis. I feel sure that in his vocabulary it was always written with a capital C of truly imposing dimensions.

"I know you are with us a great deal," said Vera, calmly. "Father is glad to have you; he likes to see something of his future successor."

"It must seem a hard thing to you you cannot inherit the title and estates?"

"Indeed, it does not. I care nothing either for wealth or honour. I was quite happy when I had neither."

Yes, it had come to this. The Belgravian beauty, the Duke's idolized daughter, looked back with a vague regret to those days at Sandstone, which had seemed so quiet and dreary. She knew now that they had been happy—happy, just because they held no pain.

"You are too modest," said Oscar, kindly. "Perhaps, though, you agree with me that there is something more precious far than the mere tinsel of a ducal coronet?"

"I do," said the girl, who would have held Hugh Dugdale's love of higher worth than the title of princess; "but I confess I did not know you held that opinion."

"You wrong me. I hold them as nothing so noble, so elevating as a mission!"

Vera shivered. She was just a little tired of the words Cause and Mission. What would she be when she spent her life with the man whose creed they were?

"To ennoble and elevate one the mission must be fulfilled," said Lady Vera, slowly. "I own I have never fulfilled mine; from my childhood I have been a dreamer."

"Because you had not found your rightful sphere, Vera. With your beauty, with your artistic tastes, nature fitted you to be the helpmeet of the champion of a great cause. I want you to come to me and help me in word and deed to fulfil my mission."

It was a strange wooing—no word of love on either side.

Vera thought of the last evening when she stood with Hugh by the waves of the great North Sea; and despite the summer sunshine, she shivered once again as she contrasted Captain Dugdale and Oscar Eastcourt.

"Are you sure I could help you?"

"I am positive. You are peculiarly fitted for the task. Your birth will influence one class, your beauty another, your sweet modesty and grace a third. My wife must have a past as fair and pure as an unwritten page. She must have nothing to conceal, for like a royal lady she must stand in 'the firm light that beats upon a throne.' When the cause succeeds her name will be a household word, her memory will have undying fame. It is a noble destiny I have to offer, and I know I could not proffer it to one more worthy, more purer in word and deed, more single in heart and purpose, than my cousin Vera."

His cousin Vera half sighed. She felt herself chosen for the cause, not for its prophet; but if he did not mind that, why should she? Since no time could give her love, why should she not take the husband her father designed for her, and at least have one satisfaction in knowing she had pleased the parent who so fondly cherished her.

"I will do my best, Oscar," said the young heiress, after rather a long pause. "I don't feel any particular call to what you call your cause; but I daresay, with you to help me, I shall feel interested in it."

"Of course. And you will come to me soon, Vera. I have reached the meridian of life, dear. You will not make me wait too long for my happiness, will you?"

"You think it will be happiness?"

"I am sure of it. I am not a demonstrative man, Vera. I do not rush into the coarse raptures of the Philistines, but I am not a stoic, I assure you. Your beauty entrances my senses, and I feel sure that between your spirit and mine, the kindred touch, the electric fire of sympathy, burns brightly!"

Vera would have been very glad to feel equally sure of it, but she felt the step was taken, and hesitation useless. After all, she had done her cousin no wrong. He did not ask her if she loved him, he did not plead for her affection; he only wanted a fellow-worker, a sort of disciple to the cause of which he was such an ardent advocate.

"Are you pleased, father?" she asked the Duke when he held her in his arms, and wished her happiness.

"I am delighted! It was the wish of my heart that my child should bear the title which came too late for her mother. You will be the most beautiful duchess in England!"

"Don't speak of that!" said Vera, with a broken sob. "Darling, I can't bear it. I would rather never be anything but plain Miss Milton all my days than bear a title that must be purchased by losing you!"

He stroked her hair fondly.

"Oscar will make a good husband, little one. You must cure him of some of his absurd notions, and he will be all we could wish."

If the prophet could only have heard his future father-in-law's sentiments I fancy he would have been ready to break off the engagement on the spot.

"I should like to have visitors soon, Vera," went on the Duke. "You know this is the last summer I can count on having you for my chateleine. July is nearly over; London will be emptying. Whom shall we invite?"

They made up a list between them. Vera did not know whether to be glad or sorry when her father mentioned the Delavals.

"Julia is such a pet of mine, and her husband is a good fellow, too! He's just back from Russia. It's a thousand pities, Vera, they have that sister always in their house."

"I don't like Miss Delaval."

"More do I. I fancy Charles and Julia would be only too relieved if she picked up a good husband. Perhaps one of our guests may take a fancy to her!"

Vera smiled. She had no talent for match-making. She wrote the notes of invitation and despatched them to the post, wishing just a little she could follow some of them to their destination.

Although Mrs. Delaval had declared to Miss Milton she had two love affairs before she met her present husband, they must have been very mild ones, or of a very fleeting nature, for she was devoted to Charles Delaval, K.C., and honestly believed him to be the most shining luminary of the day.

"Shall we go?" she asked him, when she put Lady Vera's note into his hand. "We have no engagement, and I like staying at the Towers awfully, only—"

"Only what, Jewel?"

"I had rather not tell you."

"Are you afraid of my becoming jealous of the Duke? I'll promise to keep the feeling to myself."

"No. You won't like to hear it, Charles, but Rosa isn't nice to Lady Vera."

There are some men who, defend their own relations through thick and thin, in spite of knowing them to be disagreeable.

There are others (and, oh! wives, blessed with husbands of this type, be thankful for small mercies!) who, if afflicted with a peculiarly over-protecting sister, or meddlesome mother, honestly acknowledge the misfortune, and do their best to guard their better half from the trials attendant on such connections.

Charles Delaval belonged to the latter class. "My dear child, Rosa couldn't live without being spiteful; and, really, Lady Vera is in such a secure position I don't think Miss Delaval's malice can hurt her. I think myself, Jewel, our fair Rosa is growing a little soured because she is still unchosen."

"I wish she wasn't."

His tone grew grave directly.

"Does she vex you, Jewel?"

"Awfully sometimes."

"You see, I don't know what to do with her. Money's not the difficulty. She has three hundred a year of her own, but if she left us she would never go into good society, and her chances of settling well would be over."

"I don't want her to go," said Jewel, bravely; "but I don't want her to be spiteful to Lady Vera."

"How could she be?"

"I don't know."

"We'll risk it, I think, dear. I have a shrewd suspicion your cousin Hugh will relieve us of Rosa's company now he is on his way home. She has always liked him."

Jewel started.

"He is engaged to be married!"

"He isn't."

Mrs. Delaval stared.

"He wrote and told me so."

"Nonsense!"

"I have the letter—no, I burnt it; but I remember the passage perfectly."

"How did it go?"

"You will, I am sure, congratulate me on my good fortune. I little thought when I took leave of you so abruptly, I should return so soon, and in such a novel character. You will, I know, wish Shirley and me all prosperity in our new relations."

"Jewel, you're a goose!"

"I am not!" said Mrs. Delaval, indignantly. "That could mean nothing but that he was engaged to Shirley some one or other. I did think he might have told me her surname."

The K.C. laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks. He seemed to think the matter great fun.

"Jewel, you are too innocent! It is the best joke I have heard for years!"

"I don't see it. Poor Hugh has as much right to marry on other people, and I think you are very rude to laugh at him!"

"I am not laughing at him!"

"What, then?"

"My dear child, you have made the most awful muddle of a very simple letter. Dugdale wrote to me about the same time, and, as I am not romantic, I didn't turn his phrases topsy-turvy to make them sound as if he had a love affair on hand. I was content with the bare facts—aye, and pleased, too!"

"Perhaps you will condescend to tell me what they are?" pouted Jewel.

"Certainly. Hugh Dugdale has an uncle of the name and title of Lord Shirley, resident at Shirley Priory. The old gentleman has just lost his only son, a most awful scapegrace, and Hugh is his presumptive to the title and estates."

Mrs. Delaval gasped.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course. The new character he speaks of is a man of fortune instead of a needy soldier, and his new relations with Shirley are those of adopted son. As soon as ever the Earl got over the first shock of his son's death he telegraphed to Dugdale, telling him to return home and fill the place of his heir."

"Oh!"

"You need not look so utterly miserable, Jewel! You planned a romance on very slender grounds; but it hasn't hurt anyone!"

"I'm afraid it has."

"What do you mean?"

"Can you keep a secret, Charles?"

He laughed.

"That's a nice question to ask a barrister! Why, child, I have kept weightier secrets than any you have to tell me."

"I must tell you—I should worry awfully

if I didn't; and, Charles, you'll try and understand."

"I don't think I am exceptionally dense, Jewel; so begin."

"When Hugh went to India there was someone he liked and who liked him."

"I daresay."

"Do be serious!"

"I am. Do you mean liked or loved, Jewel! It's as well to be particular, and those two letters make a great deal of difference."

"I don't know; if I did I shouldn't tell you this riddle."

"Make it as short as you can!"

"If he had been rich I am sure he would have proposed to her; but he hasn't."

"I know that, dear."

"Well, he went away, and she got rich—ever so rich—and had heaps of lovers, and said 'No' to everyone, though Hugh had been gone over a year and a-half, and she had never had even a line from him. Well, I met her, and it was when I had just got that miserable letter."

"You shouldn't abuse Hugh's epistle."

"I meant well, Charley. I thought it was such a pity she should go on thinking of him and he engaged to someone else, and I knew he (and his bride, as I thought) would soon be home. It seemed to me such a dreadful thing that she might meet him suddenly, with his wife on his arm, and so I told her."

The K.C. whistled.

"You meant well, child; but it's a pity."

"You haven't heard the worst. Within a month she accepted someone else. Now you tell me Hugh is not engaged, don't you see the mischief I've done? Why, I may have broken all their hearts!"

"Hearts are not made of such brittle stuff, Jewel."

"You don't help me a bit!"

"I'm going to. Hugh Dugdale would never be rejected by any woman who had once loved him. You must try and let him and your friend meet, and trust to Providence."

"But the other one?"

"Well, she can't marry them both. Dear me, Jewel, one often hears of hearts being caught in the rebound. Since one of the gentlemen must needs be left forsaken, what a merciful dispensation of Providence it would be if the one who was rejected turned to our Rosa for consolation!"

Wicked little Mrs. Delaval clapped her hands at the bare idea. Then she went to find her sister-in-law, and tell her of the forthcoming visit to Dornford Towers.

CHAPTER VII.

The glad August days had come again, and Whitby looked its loveliest, the summer sunshine falling on the ruins of the old abbey, and gilding them with a strange, weird splendour.

The season was at its height, and the evening train had brought in quite a crowd of visitors, but among the throng was one figure who had not to seek for lodgings, or even depend upon the accommodation of the superior hotels—a tall, soldierly man, with a mourning band on his hat.

For him a brougham drawn by two dashing greys was waiting. At his approach porters and railway officials doffed their hats, for in those parts he was an important personage.

All Whitby knew that since the death of the young Viscount Lennox, Captain Dugdale was the direct heir to the Earldom of Shirley.

There was no pride on the handsome face; rather a deep, grave gladness. He shook hands heartily both with coachman and footman.

"All well at the Priory, Saunders?"

"All well, sir."

"How are my uncle and aunt?"

"Bravely, sir. The Earl and my lady have been quite themselves since they heard that you had landed."

Hugh did not marvel at the news. He knew,

none better, that his poor cousin's whole life had been one bitter grief to his parents. Hugh felt that even in their grief at losing their only son, they would rejoice that no child of his shameless wife could ever wear the coronet of the Shirleys.

"Hugh, welcome home!"

"Aye, that was it! Henceforward the Priory was his home, the place where he should spend his life, and perhaps one day bring his bride."

He looked into his aunt's face, a great pity on his own, as he kissed her.

"This must be a sad day for you, Aunt Amy."

She plucked nervously at the crepe frills of her satin gown.

"It is better as it is, my dear; poor Lennox owned it himself. He could not have borne to think of her reigning here."

"She did not make him happy?"

"Happy! She made his life one long pain and weariness; but he is at rest now, and you are in his place."

The Earl and Countess brightened visibly as the evening wore on. They had always loved their nephew; they were proud of Hugh as a brave soldier and an honest man. They felt that of no child of their own could reign at the Priory, they were glad to have an heir for whom they need not blush. Their poor boy had made a sad mistake, which blighted his whole life; they had never even seen the woman who bore his name; they need not think of her now, for her connection with Shirley was at an end.

"You must make this your home," said the old lord, when he bade Hugh good-night; "and remember, lad, we have only you to think of. Bring home your wife when you like. So that she is a gentlewoman, pure and true, your aunt and I will cherish her as a daughter."

Hugh's face flushed, despite his bronzed cheeks. He pressed his uncle's hand, and murmured a word of thanks. His mind was full of a fair girlish face, framed with masses of auburn air. Once again he seemed to hear a sweet voice murmur "for all time!"

Of course, the first day after his return, Lord Shirley claimed poor Dugdale as his companion. Hugh found himself forced to devote quite a week to the old man's society; then one day, when his uncle had to attend a magistrate's meeting, Hugh was free, and in the identical dog-cart which had played such a part in Vera's story, he started for Whitby.

He could not bear to speak of what was next his heart. An intensely reserved man, he had never even mentioned the Sturts to Lady Shirley, lest she should think he took an unusual interest in them.

He drove over to Whitby, put up the dog-cart at the Royal, and went himself in the direction of Silver Street.

Nothing was altered. The two years of his absence had made no change apparently; the old brass plate was there, bright and polished as ever, with its familiar notice—

"Dr. Stuart."

Only when he saw the old tokens did it dawn on him there might have been changes. Two years all but a fortnight had passed since he was in Whitby. He might have found strange changes had come to pass, and as he rang the bell Hugh breathed a sigh of relief that all looked just the same.

A neat maid came in answer.

"Is Mrs. Stuart at home?"

"No, sir."

Hugh felt nonplussed. It was barely eleven o'clock. He decided hastily the doctor's wife ought to have been home at that early hour.

"I will go in and wait for her."

The girl stared.

"Mrs. Stuart is in Germany, sir, along with the master. The doctor is taking a month's holiday this year, and spending it in the Black Forest, on account of Mrs. Anstruther being there. Mr. Brown is looking after the patients. He's a very nice young gentleman, sir, and

he's in the surgery now, if you'd like me to call him."

Hugh shook his head.
"It was Mrs. Stuart I wished to see. When will she be home from Germany?"
"In about four weeks, sir; they only left last Monday afternoon."

Hugh regretted his delay, though, indeed, it had been no fault of his. Then a new thought struck him.

The housemaid seemed intelligent and civil. She might be able to help him.

"Have you been with Mrs. Stuart long?"

"Five years, sir," much surprised at the question from one she deemed a stranger.

"Ah, then, you would have seen her. Do you remember a Miss Milton, a great friend of Mrs. Stuart's daughter?"

"Miss Vera, sir!" and the girl's whole face brightened. "I'm not likely to forget her; she was too beautiful. Our Miss Doly had a nice face enough, but Miss Milton always looked as if she had stepped out of a picture."

"Can you tell me where she lives?"

"Her home is at Sandstone, sir—Sycamore Cottage; but I did hear she lived chiefly up in London."

"In London?"

"She was very ill, sir, nigh on two years ago. I know she came to us in September, and it was nigh on Christmas when she went. My master was anxious about her, and the mistress and Miss Doly nursed her night and day. She was here nigh on three months in all. We all grew to love her dearly before she went."

"Did she go to Sandstone?"

"I can't rightly say, sir. She has never been here since she went away."

"Never once?"

"Never once."

"Did your mistress quarrel with her?"

"Oh, no! Mrs. Stuart was in London in the spring, and I know she saw Miss Vera there, for she brought me back a little keepsake from her. She may be at Sandstone now for a little visit, or she may be still in London. I wouldn't take on me to say."

Hugh thanked her, regained his dog-cart and drove to Sandstone.

When a little maid showed him into the best parlour at Sycamore Cottage he seemed to understand the dreariness of Vera's life there. His heart ached for the girl who so loved all things bright and beautiful, and yet had had to pass her days in such a home.

He had asked for Mr. Rutherford. Some memory of Vera's love for "Uncle Jacob" had made him think the minister would be more sympathetic than his wife.

He had not to wait long. Very soon a tall, gaunt man came in with a kind, homely face, and a strange stoop of his shoulders, as though he found life a heavy burden, and could not stand upright beneath its load.

"I think there is some mistake," he said, gently. "Your name is quite strange to me, sir."

Hugh did not tell the pastor he was Lord Shirley's nephew and heir. He had an instinct his honours would not help him here; he only answered gravely—

"I cannot doubt it, but yours is very familiar to me. Two years ago I used to walk to Sandstone very often. Mr. Rutherford, I know you will let me speak plainly. I love your niece, Vera Milton, and it is my one desire to find her, and ask her to be my wife. I loved her when we parted two years ago; but there were many obstacles between us. I was a soldier of fortune, with no private means; debts hung like a millstone round my neck. I had no chance of being able to keep a wife, and dear as she was to me, I could not ask Vera to wait on the hope of my circumstances changing."

Mr. Rutherford sighed.

"She has a sweet face, sir, our little Vera; many's the time I used to wish her safe in a good man's keeping. I like the look of you, Captain Dugdale, and if it rested with me you

should speak to the child and learn her answer for yourself."

"But surely it does rest with you? You are her sole guardian?"

"I was her guardian for twenty years, then her father claimed her."

"Her father?"

"There was a strange misunderstanding, sir; there was a great gulf between our sister Primrose and her husband. He was rich, and great, and we fancy he had meant to marry her. My wife never knew his real name and rank until he came here to claim Vera, and she, doubting her good father, preferred to bring up the little one as our own."

"How did Mr. Milton find her?"

"From a photograph. It seems he thought no one but his wife's child could so resemble her. He was very kind to us, thanked us over again for our care of Vera, and then he took her abroad."

"Can you tell me where she is?"

"With her father."

"I mean will you give me his address, and let me ask his consent to my wooing his child?"

The minister pondered.

"I passed my word the story should never get abroad. He is a proud man, and he could not bear that anyone should know his daughter had been reared in poverty."

"I will keep the secret if you trust it to me. Were the Stuarts at home I would go to them and spare your scruples."

"You really wish to marry Vera?"

"I wish it with my whole heart!"

The minister shook his head.

"Her father is a worldly man. He has taken her to every kind of gaiety; the child's heart will always be in the right place, I know, but I fear you will find her altered, sir. She is a great lady now instead of a little country girl. One of our congregation went to London a little while ago and said he saw her driving in the Park dressed like a princess."

Hugh smiled.

"I fear nothing, Mr. Rutherford, so that she is free. My love will win her from all rivals, and I think my prospects will satisfy her father."

He is not an exacting man. He told me the child should marry whom she would so that her husband came of gentle blood. You will like my brother-in-law very much, Captain Dugdale! True, he is of the world worldly, but his manners are charming."

Poor Hugh began to feel severe doubts of Mr. Milton's status; a stuck-up parvenu, proud of his fortune, would be an infinitely more disagreeable connection than the humble pastor of Sandstone.

"If you can give me his address, sir, I will lose no time in making his acquaintance."

"He is at Dornford Towers just now, and Vera with him. I fancy they intend to remain there several weeks."

"As the Duke's guests? I know Dornford very well, and if Mr. Milton and we are friends I will ask him to use his influence in my favour."

The pastor smiled.

"I must have told my story very badly, Captain Dugdale. I thought I had told you that Mr. Milton was Vere Milton Eastcourt, Duke of Dornford, and that our little girl is his only child and heiress, Lady Vera?"

Hugh gasped.

"An heiress!"

"That need make no difference to you. The Duke openly says he is not ambitious; so that his child is happy he will be content. If you already know him it is easy for you to present yourself at Dornford."

Captain Dugdale left at once and returned to the Priory. He found his aunt busy with one of those fashionable newspapers which profess to give the latest tidings of the upper ten thousand at home and abroad.

"Fancy, Ralph!" she was saying to her husband, as Hugh came in, "the Duke of Dornford will have the wish of his heart at last.

Listen: We hear on good authority that a marriage is arranged between the Honourable Oscar Eastcourt, heir presumptive to the peerage of Dornford, and the Lady Vera Eastcourt, only child of the present Duke."

"Whew," said the Earl, quietly. "He's too old for her."

Neither of them noticed that their nephew had left the room.

Hugh felt just then he could not bear their friendly company; the blow was all too fresh and keen.

CHAPTER VIII.

Dornford Towers was gay that autumn. Guests responded gladly to the Duke's invitation, and the grand old mansion was cheerful with pretty women and brave men.

Among them all Lady Vera moved with faultless grace. She filled her post of chaperone admirably, and everyone declared the Towers could not have had a fairer mistress; but one or two who, like kindly Mrs. Delaval, had sharp eyes and quick perception, fancied that, in spite of her brilliant prospects, the Duke's daughter was not happy.

She was often tired and languid; she seemed to have lost her high spirits, and she never willingly alluded to that ceremony to take place some time in early spring which, without changing her name, would make her a wife and matron.

Her conduct to her betrothed was perfect, simply perfect everyone said. She rode with Oscar, drove with him, made copies of the endless speeches he was always being called on to deliver at public meetings.

She studied the varieties of the sunflower, and even carried a huge bouquet of its yellow blossoms at an evening party. Her manner to her betrothed was kind, respectful, and submissive, never tender or loving. A bystander remarked once that their courting was like one of those wooings of olden time, which, being conducted by deputy, had every form and ceremony, but lacked all heart and feeling; perhaps, though, the speaker was wrong, for Oscar seemed perfectly contented. Lady Vera uttered no complaint, and so the days wore on.

The Delavals prolonged their visit more than once. The husband and wife were popular with all, and Rosa had lately developed an æsthetic mania, and become one of the Honourable Oscar's most ardent disciples; in all the time he could spare from his public duties (!) and from attentions to his fiancée, Oscar devoted himself to his newest proselyte—the two were the best of friends.

"You are not vexed?" said Lady Vera, gently to Mrs. Delaval one day when Rosa had gone out walking in a terra-cotta waistless gown, a headgear adorned by peacock's feathers, and a general æsthetic appearance. "You know I never tried to convert her, but Oscar has inoculated her with his crotchets."

"Far from being vexed I am thankful Rosa has taken up a harmless hobby. Vera, one never minds what one says to you—one feels you can be trusted. Rosa is the one trouble of my life. If only she would marry Charley I should have nothing left to wish for."

"I wonder she does not. She is strikingly handsome and attractive."

"When she was young she looked too high, now at eight-and-twenty woemens are reluctant. The fact is, Rosa has an atrocious temper, and I fancy people are beginning to find it out."

"Oscar was quoting her the other day as an example of heavenly serenity."

"I wish he could hear the sentiments of her long-suffering maid. Seriously, Vera, are you sure you don't mind?"

"Mind what?" dreamily.

"My sister-in-law engrossing so much of Mr. Eastcourt's attention. Very few fiancées would like it, I fancy."

"But we are not like other people."

"You are not like anyone."

"When one promises to marry a man with a mission one doesn't expect him to be like

other lovers. He belongs to the world at large."

"I should decidedly object to a lover who belonged to anyone but me."

"I rather like it."

"Vera!"

"You see Oscar gets petting, and tender speeches and all that from outsiders. He only comes to me for sympathy and practical matters, and those are all I am good for."

"Nonsense!"

"I couldn't have married a man who was always making love to me."

"Well, I have been married four years, and I assure you Charles makes love to me sometimes even now—and I like it."

Vera smiled.

"You are so young."

"Four and twenty, two years your senior."

"But I feel as old as Methuselah. You see, Julia, you have kept your heart young and fresh."

"Haven't you?"

Vera half sighed.

"I think sometimes I haven't got a heart at all. It feels all dead and cold."

"I hope it will keep so if you persist in marrying Oscar Eastcourt."

"Julia!"

"I can't help it. You know yourself you are not the least bit in love with him."

"I like him very much."

"Do you? I can't see much to like about him. He would do very well for Rosa. It is a thousand pities you did not leave him for her!"

"Is it?"

"Vera, I want to ask you something. Promise not to be angry?"

"Well."

"Why did you accept Mr. Eastcourt?"

"I don't know."

"You must know."

"I was so tired," said Vera, slowly, "and the future all looked so vague. I thought if I accepted my cousin I should at least be safe."

"Safe from what?"

"From offers of love I could not return, from speculations as to my future."

Julia suddenly stooped down and kissed her.

"My dear, my dear!" said the happy young wife, "you are making a great mistake. You are trying to live your life without love, and you will never do it. Vera, with your nature love is as necessary to you as the air you breathe."

Vera sighed.

"I can manage without it."

"You will wreck your life."

"We shall do very well. Oscar is not exacting. The calm, cousinly liking I can give will quite satisfy him."

"And what about yourself?"

"I would rather be without love—unless I could return it."

"Do you know my cousin Hugh has come home, Vera?"

Vera winced.

"Indeed! Have you met his bride?"

"He has no bride."

"His future bride."

"It was all a mistake, dear. He wrote demanding my congratulations on his good fortune, my good wishes for him in his new relations with Shirley, and I, like a goose, thought he was engaged, and Shirley his fiancée. Instead, it is the name of some estate or other that he is to inherit one day."

"The Priory," said Vera, dreamily. "Is he really to be master of that? Why, then, he will often see Sandstone. I wonder if the dear old place is much altered?"

"I thought you hated it?"

"So I did while I was there, but since I left it I have discovered that I love Sandstone with every fibre of my nature."

"Hugh loves Yorkshire, too."

Vera never knew how she got out of the room. She felt she must be alone. She wanted to think over all the wonderful things she had heard.

Hugh was free, and lord of the lovely estate he had once described to her. Hugh was free! Oh, why had she been so hasty!

Even if he never crossed her path, if he never sought her with lover's vows, she need not have engaged herself to Oscar!

She would rather have been an old maid than the prophet's wife, rather far have led a lonely life than pass it at his side.

She had accepted him solely for fear Hugh's wife would guess her secret; and now Hugh's wife had never existed, save in her own imagination!

Meanwhile, Oscar and Miss Delaval were enjoying a delightful ramble. They had talked of the things dearest to their faith; had discovered their views; agreed in all things; that they had, as it were, but one heart beating in unison between them, when the prophet said, suddenly—

"You must come and stay with us at our own place when we settle down. Then you will see my theories carried out to perfection."

Rosa blushed and lowered her eyes with maidenly confusion.

"You are very kind to wish it."

"And you will come?"

"I fear it is impossible."

"Why?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Lady Vera shall send you the invitation in all due form, and you must accept it."

"I cannot."

"But you must. Why not?"

"I would rather not tell you."

"But I mean to know."

"For your own sake do not ask."

His curiosity was fairly aroused.

"Miss Delaval, you are making mysteries."

"I insist upon knowing."

"Because under no circumstances could I be the guest of Lady Vera."

Oscar looked more and more bewildered.

"Aren't you her guest now?"

"No; I form a part of my brother's family, and his wife is responsible for where we go; besides, Mrs. Carlyon is the actual hostess."

"Miss Delaval," said Oscar, "you have said too much or too little. Either you think Lady Vera too young for a chaperon, which is ridiculous, since a child of seventeen can fill that function if only she has a wedding-ring on her finger, or else you are casting a slur on her character."

"I am not," said Rosa, eagerly. "I would not do so for worlds. She is charming, perfect; only poor me, who am just a mere nobody, cannot afford to put Mrs. Grundy at defiance, and Lady Vera has no regard for the conveniences, so that in my position I could not be her guest without some other matron to act as chaperon. She is very lovely, and I daresay will make you happy; only, Mr. Eastcourt, you are not as other men are. You are the prophet of a great cause; you have a noble mission to fulfil. For the sake of your work I could have wished you had chosen a bride upon whose name no taint of scandal could ever rest."

"None can rest on Vera's."

"Can there not?"

She looked at him steadily, and a strange fear rose in his heart that her words had some real foundation.

"Speak."

"Is it correct that a young girl should leave her home unknown to all her friends, and travel from Scarborough to London with a man who is no kin to her? Is it correct that there should be a blank page in your wife's life that she cannot account for it?"

"Prove it!"

"Ask her yourself whether she did not leave her home two years ago in a gentleman's company, and return the next day alone! She did nothing wrong; it was mere girlish impudence; but such things are never forgotten. The wife of a man with a great work to perform should have no hidden secret in her life!"

Rosa Delaval spoke in the hope that Oscar's

engagement would be broken off; and he turned to her for consolation. She was grievously disappointed.

That evening at dinner the Duke announced that his cousin had been called unexpectedly to London. Lady Vera was not present. Alone in her own boudoir she sat reading a pencilled note, a strange, new light shining in her eyes, for once again she possessed her freedom.

"MY DEAR VERA,—

"I know all about your nocturnal journey from Scarborough to London. I acquit you of all harm, but even girlish folly would cast a shadow on anyone who had to lead such a public life as the wife of a prophet. All we have spoken of in the last weeks must be given up. I return you your troth, and am leaving Dornford for the present. I don't consider you have treated me fairly; but I shall never tell anyone the true reason of our parting, but shall always ascribe our rupture to the half-heartedness of your devotion to the great cause.—I am, dear Vera, your faithful kinsman and friend, "OSCAR."

Vera had two visitors that morning; the first her father, who came to her with a troubled look on his handsome face.

"Eastcourt actually had the impertinence to tell me you were not sufficiently in love with aesthetic doctrines to please him. Why, I thought the express purpose of his marrying was to drive all such rubbish out of his head. I should like to have knocked him down!"

"I'm glad you didn't; and, father," drawing his head down to her and kissing him, "do you know I was getting very tired of Oscar's theories and doctrines. I think a man without a mission would be a pleasant partner for life."

"Then you are not sorry?"

"I am unutterably relieved. I had thought for some time Oscar and I were unsuited; but I could not break it off myself, because I am an Eastcourt, and our word is our bond. But for your disappointment I should be quite happy."

"Vera, don't think of my disappointment. I had set my heart on your being a duchess, but after all I could never have seen you bear your honours. It is best as it is."

The other visitor was a very different person—bright, cheery Mrs. Delaval.

"Well!" she said, meaningly, "what does this sudden departure mean? Have you come to your senses?"

"No, but my cousin has!"

"You mean—"

"He thinks me not sufficiently devoted to the cause, and therefore we had better part."

Mrs. Delaval clapped her hands:

"I admire the cause more than I ever did before, since it has set you free. I will even wear sundresses on my next ball dress! Do you know, Vera, I had fancied it was something else?"

"What?"

"I am afraid to tell you."

"I can guess. Julia, I can trust you. That is the real reason of our parting, only the other one will do for my father and the world at large."

"Then my sister-in-law is a traitress. Rosa is not above eavesdropping or tale-bearing. I have felt she knew the history of that night, only I thought it was impossible."

"I wonder why she hates me so?"

"It was not hatred for you actuated her wild desire to become a duchess. I believe she thinks Oscar will turn to her for consolation."

But he did not. Very soon the papers announced the arrival of the Honourable Oscar Eastcourt in London, whence it was stated he meant to start on a tour through Italy.

Miss Delaval was in despair, but I don't think anyone particularly pitied her. She went home with her brother and his wife, and a great calm fell over the Towers.

In those days a little note came from Dorothy Anstruther, begging her old friend to come and stay at Whitby. She was in Silver

Street for a month, and it would be just like old times if they but could be together.

Vera doubted, hesitated, and finally started for Yorkshire.

"I never was so glad of anything as when I heard your engagement was broken off," said pretty Mrs. Anstruther the day after Vera's arrival. "I heard Mr. Eastcourt lecture once, and I hated him."

"It was a mistake."

"And shan't you ever marry anyone?" asked Dolly, who had expected a little confidence, and imagined a tale of a successful rival to the Honourable Oscar.

"I don't think so."

"Vera," said Mrs. Stuart, gently, "you would rather go alone to Sandstone, wouldn't you? The doctor wants to drive you, but I told him I was sure you would rather walk in, and take them by surprise."

"Much rather, dear Mrs. Stuart!"

But though she set off in good time, Vera loitered on the road. The old familiar path was full of strange, sweet memories, and when at last she reached the gardens of Sandstone the tears stood in her eyes. Then, as now, it was the sweet sad time of early autumn.

"It is all just the same," said the girl, in a voice she hardly recognized as her own. "Nothing is altered. I alone am changed."

"You are not changed," said a voice near her. "I should have known you anywhere!"

Hugh Dugdale stood at her side. So the two who had parted in Mrs. Delaval's drawing-room met again, the two who loved each other, and yet had never been acknowledged lovers.

"Then you have come back?"

"Yes," I came home joyously enough, but I soon found I had scant cause for gladness."

"Shirley?"

"Shirley will be mine some day," he answered, interrupting her quickly; "but what matters that when my heart's desire is denied me?"

She could not speak, only she raised her beautiful eyes to his face full of a wondrous love.

"And you are a great lady; the little girl I used to know is to be a duchess. Will you let me wish you happiness?"

"Wish me all the happiness you will, but I shall never be a duchess."

"I heard you were to marry your father's heir?"

"We were engaged six weeks."

"And you jilted him?"

"I think he jilted me. He told me we had better part at least."

"And you were sorry?"

"I never was more glad."

"Whatever made you accept him?"

"Father wished it, and I wanted to feel settled."

"Then you tired of your old love of freedom?"

"I don't know."

"Mr. Eastcourt must be a strange man."

"Why?"

"Because holding your promise he set you free. Did he find out you did not believe in love?"

"He did not want me to. No, he found out something else."

"What was it?"

She looked into his eyes.

"Only the story of a summer night two years ago. Only the tale of my first journey to London."

"And that parted you?"

"Yes. Don't be sorry; I was so glad. He was a man with a great cause, and I wearied of it so. The day after he was gone I had my sunflower in the house thrown away, and all the peacock's feathers made into a great bundle. It was very childish, but oh! I had so wearied of them!"

"And you are happy?"

"Happy," ponderingly. "I don't know. Is anyone quite happy? Are you?"

"I should be if I had one boon. Vera, I love you dearly. I will do what heart and

life can to make you happy. When fortune came to me I hurried home hoping to find the lonely little girl I had left and gild her life with the sunshine that had come to brighten mine. Alas! she had vanished. They told me that far away she had blossomed into a queen of fashion—a great lady."

"She has not changed for you. She is Vera still, just as ever."

"And what is Vera's answer? Can she love me still?"

One of his arms was round her now. They sat together on one of the seats, and all alone, it seemed to them an earthly paradise.

"I think I loved you always, even from the first. Oh! Hugh, I have wanted you so badly."

"And I you. Then you will be my wife, sweetheart. You will give yourself to me?"

"Yes," she whispered, fondly, "because I know your love is for all time, and that your true, loyal heart is—Vera's Kingdom."

THE END.

TOMBSTONE CURIOSITIES

Of quaint and curious epitaphs there would seem to be no end. Many examples of such have from time to time been recorded, and, in the hope that a few further specimens may prove interesting, we give the following:—

Our first example appears on a tombstone in the churchyard at Ayr:—

Here lies the body of Mickander Macpherson, Who was a very extraordinary person; He was two yards high in his stocking feet, And kept his accoutrements clean and neat; He was siew at the battle of Waterloo. The bullet went in at the throat, And came out at the back of his coat.

A bachelor buried in Aberdeen churchyard is the subject of the following epitaph:—

At three score winters' end I died, A cheerless being, lone and sad; The nuptial knot I never tied, And wished my father never had.

Here is an inscription which may be found on a tombstone beneath a yew-tree in Forden churchyard, near Welshpool:—

Beneath this tree lies sinners three, One tenor and two basses; Now they are gone, 'tis ten to one If three such take their places.

In the churchyard of Lillingdon, Dorset, is the following on a linen-drapers:

Cottons and cambrics, all adieu, And muslins, too, farewell; Plain, striped, and figured, old and new, Three-quarters, yard or ell.

By nail and yard I've measured ye, As customers inclined; The churchyard now has measured me, And nails my coffin bind.

On a tombstone in St. Leonard's churchyard is this inscription:—

Beneath this silent stone is laid A noisy, antiquated maid, Who from her cradle talked till death, And ne'er before was out of breath.

IN A QUIET NEIGHBOURHOOD

Mrs. Spankers: "I wish to get a house in a quiet neighbourhood."

Agent: "Yes, madam; we can accommodate you. I have a vacant house in a street which is as quiet as a Sabbath morn all the year round. No barking dogs, no children, no nuisance of any kind."

"That's exactly what I want. How lucky I happened to come to you! How many rooms has it?"

"Ten."

"That's just right. We need a good deal of room. We have nine children. I hope there's space at the back for a dog-house. We have three."

CURIOUS CUCKOO SUPERSTITIONS

One of the first heralds of approaching spring is the cuckoo. He is a bird of passage, who, like most of his kind, spends his summers in Europe, and his winters in Asia or Africa. He arrives in England about the beginning of April, resting a little time at Malta on the way, and takes his departure soon after midsummer.

Among the peasantry in some parts of France, it is supposed that after St. James's Day, July 25, the cuckoo changes into a bird of prey, and inhabits the mountains during the winter; but that in the springtime he resumes his natural form, and returns to France on the back of a kite.

There is no bird which is so generally believed to possess the gift of prophecy as the cuckoo. In Germany there is a popular belief that the one who first hears him in the spring can ascertain how many years he has to live. He simply asks the bird the question, and as many times as it responds, so many times will the questioner see the trees put forth their leaves, and watch their fruit arrive at maturity.

In Sweden the young girls consult the cuckoo to know when they will be married, and the number of times he answers indicates the number of years they will have to wait; but if he continues an unreasonable time they say he is settled on a magic branch, and consequently his predictions are not to be relied upon.

A very important point, according to them, in the interpretation of his responses, is to notice from what direction his voice comes. If from the north, it means sorrow and trouble for all the year; but if from the east, west, or south, pleasure and happiness may be anticipated.

If one has money in one's pocket the first time one hears him, a prosperous year will follow; but if the purse is empty, it will be difficult to replenish it. And one is liable to die of hunger during the year if the cuckoo is heard for the first time when one is fasting.

In Servia the cuckoo presages disaster if he is heard in the forest before the trees have assumed their foliage; on the contrary, if the branches are already covered with leaves when he first appears, happiness and plenty may be expected.

In Switzerland, and in some parts of Germany, the cuckoo is called the "baker's boy." According to a legend he is in reality a baker's boy, who in the hardest of times was not ashamed to steal the food of the poor, or to pilfer the best of the bread when it was taken from the oven, crying out as he did so in the most impudent manner: "Guk, guk!" which in old German means "Look, look!"

God was so angry with him for his depredations, that he turned him into a bird, with a powdery grey plumage, to remind him of his ancient calling, and condemned him to repeat constantly the words in remembrance of his unscrupulous fault.

The Russians regard the cuckoo as a bird of ill omen, the precursor of sorrow and death. According to their legends, he is a young girl who angered the gods by weeping too long for the death of her brother, and was changed into a cuckoo.

In almost all countries it is considered unlucky to kill this bird, in spite of his reprehensible propensities from a domestic point of view. Whether his objection to nest-building arises from natural laziness, or from natural incompetency, it is difficult to say; but it is indisputable that he has a strongly developed tendency to utilise the ready-made nests of other birds. This, however, does not prevent his being welcomed among us as the harbinger of spring, and the forerunner of the singing-birds, who in summer fill the land with music.

PHILANTHROPIST: "How can you bear to thus evade your duty to yourself and society? No man, however humble, but can find in himself some natural gift, to cultivate which is a profit as well as a pleasure." Weary Watkins: "Partner, I discovered long ago that I had a natural gift for restin'."

A DESPERATE DEED

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Harold, Earl of Silverdale, is spending the Christmas holidays at Woodville Honour. His host, Sir Stuart Woodville, has twin daughters, Lillian and Marguerite, who bear such a striking resemblance to each other that a stranger finds it extremely difficult to distinguish between them. Marguerite has already a dark page in her young life, while Lillian has given her maiden confidence and love to the Earl, and a marriage is speedily arranged. The Earl and Countess of Silverdale are returning from their honeymoon, and, while staying in London for a few days, a telegram reaches the Earl, stating that his daughter Iva, by his first wife, has been injured in a fire. The Earl at once leaves for Belgium. During his absence Lillian agrees with Marguerite to return quietly to their Sussex home. They are detained on the way owing to an accident. Lillian is mistaken a second time for Marguerite by Reuben Garratt who holds her sister's secret. He had followed Lillian to her room at the hotel, and she, terrified at his threats, is powerless to say a word, when he fires, and she falls lifeless. Marguerite, finding the body a little later, takes to the situation at a glance, and determines that she, Marguerite Woodville, is dead, and that Lillian, Countess of Silverdale, still lives.

Marguerite's (as we will continue to call her) first interview with the Earl passes off successfully. Reuben Garratt, finding her an easy prey (but still believing her to be Lillian), determines to throw her child by Sir Geoffrey Damyn on her hands. Sir Geoffrey, to Marguerite's consternation, visits her husband. Sir Geoffrey is staggered by what he regards as the resemblance between Marguerite and Lillian. The Earl is greatly concerned at the strange behaviour of the Countess, and many things have happened to arouse his suspicions and to cause uneasiness.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"A n-night I-like this n-always makes me remember some v-erues I wrote once."

They were out of the darksome tower now and hastening up the avenue.

"Head him off, someone!" cried the author from London.

But Bariston persisted.

"It be-began th-this way:—"

"B brooding is night and a sweet;
The flowers n-od in a d-dream;
The m-moon that climbs yon steep
Is j-just as I fair as c-cream!"

A painful silence.

Then hysterical, subdued, half-explosive sounds.

The poor, little poet! But to his assistance aid came from an unexpected quarter.

"I like that," Mrs. Vere, lumbering along among them, spoke suddenly. "The last line is especially good. It is so appetising. I always was fond of whipped cream with just a little sugar and a spoonful of sherry or rosewater. I admire your poetry, Mr. Bariston."

There was a burst of irrepressible laughter from the others.

"Thanks!" sighed the poet, who had found at last one appreciative heart. "Thanks!"

But his voice sounded as though it had come from his boots.

Oddly enough they had not missed the Countess.

Those in the rear supposed she was ahead with the Earl and Mrs. Trendworth. They in turn presumed she was behind with the rector or Lady Iva.

"Oh, for a song!" cried the Marquis.

"Yes," seconded Nora Dallas, eagerly—"sing Iva!"

"Do favour us!" urged the rector.

"Be generous!" implored her escort.

"No—oh, no!"

She shrunk at the suggestion. Sing! and her heart so sad? While he lay in his lonely cell—and she was at times such a cruel judge, so full of scorn of him! Why, she had not sung since Christmas night, when Sir Geoffrey had paused at the doors long enough to hear her song.

Distinctly she recalled him as he waited, listening, the lamplight shining down on his blonde head, his pale, high-bred face.

What had she sung? Something Mr. O'Donnell had urged her to give them. She had remembered it now; but she did not know, she never would know that the refrain of that

song, that alone, had brought Damyn back to Silverdale Castle that night with his planned purpose uncompleted.

How did it run:

"Oh, what was love made for if 'tis not the same
Through joy and through torment, through glory
and shame?"

I ask not, I care not, if guilt's in that heart—
I but know that I love thee whatever thou art!"

The simple, sincere lines! They thrilled her as might a magical invocation.

She thought of Lionel! His face seemed to grow out of the night before her—that splendid resolute face, with the firm, handsome mouth and brave, loving, brilliant eyes. She remembered his steadfastness, his innate nobility, his infinite grace of thought which blossomed into speech. All her soul went out to him in one dumb and passionate cry, which not for a crown, not for a kingdom would she have voiced, even to herself,—

"I but know that I love thee whatever thou art!"

"Lillian!"

The Earl had stopped—called out.

"Lady Silverdale! She is not with us."

They were almost home.

"Not with you!"

A brief excuse to Mrs. Trendworth. Then the Earl dashed toward the advancing group.

"Are you certain?"

"Quite certain."

"How could it have happened?" he cried. "She will be frightened to death. We have left her alone—behind us—in Ivy Tower!"

Backward, along the path they had just traversed, he started on a run. More agile than many a younger man, he ran fleetly, without pausing.

Hot and breathless he grew; but he raced right on. A long time it took him to retrace his way, or so it seemed to him—a long time.

He strained his eyes. Might he not discern in the distance the familiar little figure?

There was no human thing in sight. Perhaps she had fainted when she found herself alone.

Compassionate, as are all strong and tender natures, he almost forgot her sin and his alienation, in the thought of her possible fear—loneliness.

At last!

He could see the great green walls ahead. He pushed on.

Reached!

He bounded up the slight elevation upon which the Tower stood, sprang under the dusky entrance arch just as a man came rushing down the winding stair, leaped past him, almost knocking him over in his reckless haste, cleared the threshold, and sped away into the moonlight—into the darkness of the demesne!

Who was he?

Pursuit would be in vain. Indeed he felt stunned.

"Lillian!"

The croaking cry. Its hoarseness startled him.

Her voice answered him from above. Her little high-heeled shoes came clicking down the bare stone steps.

A moment more and she stood beside him.

Neither broke the oppressive silence. He caught her by the arm. He hurried her out of that weird place of shadow. Without he relaxed his grasp, faced her.

"Who is he?"

"Is who, Harold."

She tried to speak fearlessly. Her voice would not obey her will. It sounded faint and broken.

"The man who sprang past me just now."

"Harold—"

He threw his hand up with an imperious gesture.

"Take care! Do not oblige me to use brutal words to you—to tell you a lie!"

A harsh speech; but he was hardly himself. One suspicion piling upon another had spurred him to the verge of insanity.

She fell back.

"The threat is brutal!" she said, in a low tone.

He did not heed her.

"Listen!" he cried; "and answer! What new lover do you meet here by day—by night?"

Lover!

Yes, that was the very word. A genuine horror came into those wide, dry eyes of hers. Lover! Now, may Heaven have pity on her if it had come to this between them, for no wedded wife could be more true than she in fealty to him.

Lover! How the word dazed, dismayed her! She could not speak. And he thought her silence guilt.

"Ah, you offer no denial!"

The bitter taunting words were just the last she needed.

"Denial!" she echoed, with shaking lips.

"Both your accusation and your threat preclude that!"

Pathetic in its pallor was the small face framed in by the hood of crimson-lined fur. He was touched. He discarded his air of severe disdain.

"Tell me," almost pleadingly, "the truth." She flung back her head. She looked him straight and full in the face.

Up the avenue she could catch the sound of voices. Others were coming to meet them.

"Have the truth, then! You are my only lover," every word stabbing the air like a stiletto, "and," more slowly still, "I wish to Heaven I had never looked upon your face!"

She wheeled around, sped away, left him standing there.

"There is the Countess!"

"Ah, Lady Silverdale!"

"Did we really desert you?"

"Did you see a ghost?"

They closed about her with every comment, questions.

"Oh, yes," she cried, loudly—"yes, indeed, I saw a ghost! A real, live ghost—yes!"

And then she broke out in wild, hysterical sobs, in shrill, resounding, uncanny laughter.

"Little mamma!"

Iva made her way to her side.

The Earl hurried up.

But she only laughed on—laughed and cried

"Hysteria," someone said.

They took her home; they sent for Dr. Cullen.

He came. He went up to my lady's dainty room, where Iva opened the door for him. He looked very grave.

In the hall the Earl walked up and down, awaited his descent.

He came at last.

"Brain fever!" he said.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A clean and cosy little room. On the walls a bright, be-flowered paper; on the floor a square of crimson drugget; in the iron grate a cheerful sea-coal fire—it actually smelled cheerful; on the one modest window a pair of snowy Swiss curtains; on the walls a few very brilliant pictures, concerning the artistic merits of which, perhaps, the lens said the better.

On the round table in the centre of the apartment a clear, porcelain-shaded lamp; and by the table, in a heavy, old-fashioned chair—a gentleman.

He matched the chair; he was old-fashioned, too. His clothes, of the richest of material, were obviously antiquated at to cut; his linen was ruffled; his tie was a painfully exact, big black bow, and from his massive watch-chain swung two large topaz seals.

A hale and hearty man still, Mr. Francis Vale, despite his sixty-odd years. Tall, muscular, energetic, with a clever, keen, bold-featured face. The high-bridged nose indicated character; the close-pressed lips had a

sort of saturnine grimness; the deep-set eyes held a snap which bespoke their owner's quick temper, and a twinkle which belied the same; silvery hair, shaggy brows, and a still dark moustache—quite a bristling ferocious moustache—and now you have seen him.

A knock!
Mr. Vale straightened up and looked toward the door.

"Come in!"
The portal was pushed ajar.
"Ah, mine host! Bad night!"

"Mine host" advanced, and set carefully down on the red table-cloth the tray he carried.

A bright silver tray it was, and it bore two tumblers which positively shone with polishing, a decanter containing a vintage of a deep golden hue, a blue china sugar-bowl, surmounted by quaint claw tongs—also a wine glass, two spoons, a knife and a lemon.

The proprietor of the "Silverdale Arms" turned his sandy head on one side and took a silent inventory.

At least, so he presumably was doing, for his eyes never could be brought to regard together any certain object. They were strong-willed eyes, and evidently held conflicting opinions.

So just now while one glanced over the tray the other gazed upon the portrait of the Duchess of Devonshire (whom the explanatory line underneath declared it to be), which adorned the opposite wall. The double survey was evidently satisfactory, for he smiled, rubbed his hands, and looked at his guest.

"Bad, sir? Yes, sir. Hawful bad night, sir. Never was no worse, sir. Hearken to that wind, sir. Black as Rubus, too, sir."

"As what?"
"Rubus, sir!" complacently.

Mr. Francis Vale, bending toward the fire to adjust the little fat brass kettle singing thereon, turned his head.

"Erebus, you mean."
"Precisely so," assented Mr. Dock, not at all disconcerted. "I knowed it was the name of someone black."

"Oh!"
And now the twinkle in his eyes had quite eclipsed the snap.

"Anything more, sir?"
"No. Hold on, though."

He "held on." He looked at the duchess—or, rather, the eye which seemed to especially admire the duchess looked at her (oh, poor Georgiana to be thus portrayed!); the other regarded his guest.

Those stupid detectives did not seem to be making any headway in this miserable Silverdale murder business, thought that same guest. He could do better himself, by George! He had half a mind to try. He wondered if this fat old fellow with the full-moon face—harvest-moon at that—the "contrary" eyes and the ruby nose, could help him out at all.

It was worth finding out.

"Davis in?"
"No, sir."

Davis was a professional from Scotland Yard especially employed on this case.

The second tumbler and second spoon were originally intended for Davis.

But Mr. Dock would no doubt be quite as appreciative.

"Sit down."
"Eh, sir!"

The rebellious eye hurriedly left the picture of Georgiana.

"I said sit down."

He had quite an imperious way about him which awed his inferiors.

Meekly Mr. Dock sat down. Deliberately the gentleman from London cut the lemon and laid a slice in his tumbler. On the lemon he just as thoughtfully deposited two cubes of sugar. From the decanter he filled the wine-glass once and half again, and poured the golden liquor over the sugar. Then he took the little brass kettle from the fire, and almost

filled his tumbler with the boiling water. He smelled, sipped—and smiled.

"Go ahead!"
Mr. Dock started up.

"Yes, sir."
"I mean make yourself a glass of toddy."

"Oh, sir!"
"Hurry up!"

With flattered alacrity mine host did as he was bidden.

"Now, tell me all you know about the murder of Sir Geoffrey Damyn."

The proprietor of the inn, sitting stiffly on a slippery horse-hair chair, glass in hand, began a glib recital of the main facts of the tragedy.

"Oh, hang that rot, man! Everyone knows what everyone knows. Tell me the suspicion of the townfolks—your own suspicions. Or do you believe Curzon guilty?"

The little landlord was not timid now.

"No, sir!" he cried, emphatically.

"Ah, indeed!"
The exclamation was interestedly interrogative.

"No, sir; no more guilty than—begging your pardon, sir—than you are. Him, sir?"

Why, he wouldn't "arm a dog, sir! If he thought the other gentleman deserved killing, sir, he'd 'ave downed him in a fair fight—not 'ave shot him in the back, sir. When Jem Harris broke his leg, and was laid up, who supported his family till he could get round again? Mr. Lionel, sir. When young Tommy Ginnis was to be sent up for poachin', who went to the magistrates and says, 'It's his first wrong step. Give him a bit of mercy. He's only a lad. And they did? Mr. Lionel, sir. When my poor boy was sick for months—be's gone now, sir—who'd drop in most hevery night?—and noose he liked to so well, always kind and pleasant. Mr. Lionel, sir. And ye think he'd commit murder—Mr. Lionel, sir?"

The stout, prosaic innkeeper was a fervent defender. It was not the whisky toddy which inspired him, for he had not yet drank it.

"I don't think so, my good man."

There was neither flash nor twinkle in those deeply-intrenched eyes now—just a dimness.

It spoke well for the prisoner that he had awakened such affection, such loyalty as this!

He must be his father's son, Mr. Vale decided. And he was glad he was doing his poor best to help him.

Two minutes—five—ten!

It was a nasty night without. March has a notoriously unpleasant reputation. This particular evening confirmed with a vengeance the reason for the same.

They could hear the spiteful wind snarling around the house; the rain blustering at the window.

"Have you no reason to suspect anyone else?" Vale asked, draining his glass.

Dock shook his head.

"Think again. Any suspicious characters round town? Or were there any about that time? You ought to know."

Again that negative gesture.

The other persevered.

"Anyone leave town suddenly about Christmas?"

He proceeded to cut another slice of lemon.

"Not that I know of, sir. Unless—"

He stopped.

"Unless whom?"

Mr. Dock laughed.

"Oh, he never done it either, sir. But he left kind of hasty like. He said as how he'd got a lot of money from his brother in America, and he was going there hat once."

There was a flash under Mr. Vale's shaggy brows. But he went on concocting a second supply of spiritual refreshment.

"When did you say he left?"

"Between Christmas and New Year, sir."

"What is his name?"

"Rick Pollen."

"How much money had he?"

"Fifty pounds."

"When did he receive it?"

"Christmas Day, he told the boys."

"Thank you! Good night, Mr. Dock?"

Thus dismissed, Mr. Dock finished his punch and retired.

Half an hour passed.

Then came another knock.

"Oh, come in!"

He came in—Davis.

A dapper, youngish man, with a pair of well-brushed side whiskers and a mouthful of dazzling, false teeth.

"Anything new?"

"The Countess of Silverdale is down with brain fever."

"All the worse for the Countess. But we have nothing to do with her. Listen! I've been playing ferret myself to-night."

Briefly he repeated Dick's admission.

"I want you to find out all about this chap to-morrow, and to discover at the bank if he really cashed an American cheque there. Perhaps there is nothing in his abrupt departure, and there may be a good deal."

Davis bowed.

And the result of the following day's investigation was a telegram sent to "Luke Pollen, E. Taylor St., Chicago, Illinois, U.S.," and the message within ran as follows:

"Insist on your brother Rick returning to Rothlyn at once. His evidence required. All expenses paid."

"(Signed) Francis Vale."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"You are feeling stronger, I trust?"

The formal, icy inquiry. It chilled her as no utter neglect could have done.

"Thank you, yes!"

He bowed and began busying himself with some papers on the centre table.

She turned her head languidly away, and lay cuddled down among her silken cushions on the broad lounge.

A delicious day! sweeter far in its freshness, its springtime fragrance than would be its unborn summer sisters, deep-hearted and full-blown!

If March had come in like a lion, and so it assuredly had, it was going out like the mildest, the most demure of lambs.

What a weary month it was—what an inexpressibly miserable month!

So ill had my lady been—ill almost unto death! But again, as in her girlhood, when she had prayed for his kiss, that capricious monarch had passed her by.

With the assurance of her serious sickness all her guests had gone that is, all except Mrs. Vere, who seemed to be a fixture.

Doctor Cullen desired a consultation on her case, so they had sent to the city for a famous physician.

He came, and gave it as his opinion that her disease was rather mental than physical.

He prohibited mention of any exciting topic in her presence, and enjoined absolute rest.

When he returned to town he sent down a nurse, a quiet, capable woman. She and Iva tended the invalid night and day for three tedious weeks.

What a frantic delirium was hers! They shuddered as they listened to her wild, incoherent talk—of a murdered man, of the shot which killed him, of Ivy Tower, of Geoffrey—Geoffrey! of a ghost, of a dead woman's face, of Harold!

Not once during that burning, babbling illness did the Earl enter the sick room. He was afraid to do so. He did not want to hear her crazy cries. To the others they were mere jargon. To him they would mean more than the ravings of an invalid.

So every morning and every night he made polite inquiries regarding her, but he did not ask to see her.

Lady Iva knew that something was wrong—that her father no longer loved the young wife of whom he had talked to her that day in the Belgian hospital with such impassioned affection.

Those days of tiresome attendance in a sick chamber were very trying on the girl herself.

She grew thin. Dark shadows came under those luminous violet eyes of hers. Far less seldom than of old that quick, glad, winsome smile she used to wear curved the rose-red lips.

Her father looked at her often and anxiously. How fond she was of her step-mother! How devoted to her! But the fatigue of nursing was telling on her.

It was not all the fatigue of nursing, could he but have known.

In those days of sadness, of seclusion, she came to know her own heart. It forced her to bear its secret, so loudly it beat out in the midnight watches when all the house was still—in the chill dusk of the dawns.

At last the dragging days were done. My lady woke, sane, but weak and helpless as a little child.

To-day—the last day of March it was—the nurse had taken her up bodily and carried her down to the library.

There Lady Iva awaited her. There was the lounge heaped high with downy pillows. There was a steaming, shining urn and a salver bearing the most tempting of dainties. There a friendly little fire which crackled a welcome. There a big Nankin bowl filled with hyacinths, pink and cream and blue, shedding perfume through the room. There, best of all, the streaming amber radiance of the spring sunshine.

But the tiny creature in the loose dressing-gown scarcely saw the loving preparations for her reception, the refreshing beauty of the day.

Iva bent and kissed her, patted her pillows, and told her how pleasant it was to have her down again.

But the large grey eyes looked vainly around, then moved to the fire, and stared at it with a sullenness which only masked most bitter disappointment.

"A step—his—at last!"

She tried to sit up, but fell back.

A pitiful little spark of colour dashed out in her white cheek, and died almost at birth.

She had not seen him since the night she had been stricken down—not since the moment she had cried out to him so passionately that she wished she had never looked upon his face.

How would he meet her now? Tenderly as of old, or—

Iva rose.

"I am going for a walk, little mamma."

She passed out the lower door as the Earl strode in at the upper.

The decided step paused.

Was he hesitating as to whether he should advance at all, or not?

He came slowly over to the lounge beside the hearth, looked down upon its occupant.

That Lillian?

He was really shocked by the change in her.

Her hair had been cut close; she looked woefully worn and wasted; the veins on the milk-white temples were blue and distinct; the small hands looked smaller than ever and almost transparent.

But with his dismay, with his impulse of sympathy, commiseration, came the recollection of her crime.

He spoke coldly:

With all the dignity she could muster, she replied in terms just as frigid.

Then silence, intensely irritating, laden with tragedy, fell upon them.

Did he think she lied to him that night at Ivy Tower? He must, or why this studied estrangement?

Ah, it has been a long time growing! Who could tell what first had caused the "little rift within the lute?"

What had he meant by saying "a new lover?" He knew nothing of Geoffrey—at least, he had known nothing, believed nothing, up to Christmas Day.

How affectionate he had been then! Never since.

And the night of that day Sir Geoffrey was killed. He had told the Earl nothing; he had had no chance to speak to him.

What if, walking in the demesne, Harold had found the revolver which she, so recklessly, so foolishly, had flung aside!

The thought startled her.

But the next moment she was ready to smile at her fear.

Even so, he would never think of associating her with such a weapon, never dream that she possessed such a clumsy and repulsive toy.

No, it had not been found at all. If it had been she would certainly have heard. It had probably fallen in some hollow, some bush or clump of bushes, and there it would remain—for years, perhaps.

Closer she drew her Indian shawl about her shoulders, and snuggled down in her perfumed nest.

The rustle of the Earl's paper reached her ear.

She did not turn her head in his direction, just lay, her unnaturally bright eyes fixed full on the grate, and thought and thought.

Lionel! He was probably in prison yet, poor boy.

She must find out just when his trial was to take place. If able, she would be present. It was terribly hard he should be jailed like a common criminal for another's sin.

They could not convict him—oh, no! But if they should do so? Then she must speak. Tell the truth? Not that; she dare not do that! But concoct some plausible story—she could trust her woman's wit not to fail her.

Perjury!

Conscience, like a cruel snake, hissed the one word.

She shrank. He would not be convicted—would not need her testimony. If he were—well, yes, then! It would be, must be perjury—just that!

How warm the room was! Her eyes fairly ached from the hearth glow—she was tired.

The heavy lids drooped, lifted, drooped again—shut.

Fifteen minutes later Mrs. Vere waddled into the room.

"Lilian!"

Lord Silverdale involuntarily lifted a warning hand.

"I think she is asleep."

"That she is."

At the side of the low lounge she stood.

"She has been very ill!" in a guttural whisper.

"Yes," replied his lordship.

Soundly she slept, one delicate hand thrown upwards—a hand with a zigzag red scar across the waxen fairness of the palm.

Absently Mrs. Vere regarded the mark. When and where had she first noticed it? It was singularly familiar.

"Goodness gracious!"

The exclamation was not loud, but it was emphatic.

She sank into the nearest chair, an expression of bewilderment on her broad countenance.

His lordship glanced up.

"I can't understand it," she confided to him, still in that loud whisper. "Did you ever notice that mark on Lillian's hand?"

Yes, he had observed it, was the Earl's reply to Mrs. Vere.

"Well, when Marguerite came home from London with her hand—her left hand, too—tied up, we all asked her about it. The cause, she said, I think, was a bottle of scent which had broken in her grasp. Her palm was badly cut. And now here is Lillian with exactly the same sort of a scar—and on her left hand, too."

Blankly the Earl stared at the old lady. She was leaning across the table, voluble and amazed.

"I can't understand it, as I said. Those

two were enough alike, Heaven knows, without going and hurting themselves in just the same way."

"Hush!"

She looked questioningly around. The little figure, half buried in the pillows, was stirring.

The Earl rose and left the room.

He felt oddly dismayed.

There was nothing strange about Mrs. Vere's discovery—decidedly not. Nevertheless it seemed to daze him.

He would go down to the smoking-room—have a cigar—get rid of mysteries for a while.

Along the passage he walked quickly.

"Hullo! I beg your pardon."

He had almost knocked down a portly individual, attired in all the noise and splendour of a new black silk, who was coming towards him.

"I ask yours, sir. Good heavens!"

Another feminine exclamation.

Deep down in his heart I'm afraid his lordship swore. The new comer had fallen against the opposite wall in an ecstasy of recognition.

Her face was that of a stranger.

The Earl paused expectantly. Clearly she was expected to speak.

She made him a bow. And she spoke.

"I was clean taken off my feet, sir, as you must forgive my flusteration; because I never expected to see you again."

"Indeed!"

His lordship smiled.

Where had she sprung from?

"No, sir; but I allus remem-bered your beard and your smile."

Ah, here was a romantic mystery.

"You did! Well, that was awfully good of you! But who under the sun are you?"

A leading question, that!

The buxom dame straightened up.

"Mrs. Martin Simpson, sir."

"Well, Mrs. Martin Simpson"—with profoundly reverential enunciation—"where did you ever see me and why do you come here?"

"I come here for a visit, seeing as I'm my first cousin to Mrs. Brown."

"The housekeeper?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well?"

"An' I seen you—your picture, rather—on the heart of a corpse."

His lordship swore—out loud this time.

But Mrs. Martin Simpson held her ground.

"Yes, sir. I keep the 'Royal Bull,' where the young lady, Miss Marguerite Woodville died."

"Oh, you do? Well, I'm not much enlightened. What has this to do with me?"

"Nothing, sir; except that I laid her out for the dismal tomb, an' in doing so I found a locket around her neck."

"Yes."

"I opened it. I oughtn't, I suppose. The other lady—the Countess—seemed dreadful put out when I told her."

"Go on," he cried.

"Well, there isn't any more," avowed Mrs. Martin Simpson. "The dead young lady had a locket on her heart, and the face in it was your face; as I'm a living woman."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

An April afternoon. The eve of Lionel Curzon's trial for murder. A day of grace and beauty.

All the morning it had rained, not violently, not coldly, but in soft and summery showers. Indeed, Nature had wept as just a few women can, without disfiguring her lovely face or ruffling her placid bosom.

And at noon the sun had come out and sent his beaming smile across the young green of the fields, the dripping foliage of the trees, the hyacinths in my lady's garden, the little, loving primrose by the wayside.

And now, just now, as "his chariot westward rolled," some of that gracious, golden light found its way through the harsh, black bars grating a prison window.

Lionel dropped his book, turned to it as though it were a friendly human face.

The blessed sunshine! And without the sweet spring day! This to him had been always the dearest season—when all life awoke in exuberance and glow; when the fish began to leap in the stream; when the crocus held

"A tender leaning
Towards the summer's richer wealth of flowers!"
when the linnet began to sing, the apple-trees to bud, the lilacs to bloom.

He knew just how the garden at the Towers must look now. That precious old home of his. He had better not think of it at all.

He turned resolutely away from that daffodil gleam, bent his face again over his book—a changed face, but so subtly altered one could hardly tell wherein the difference lay.

Paler, of course; confinement had had its usual effect. Unsmiling? That was only natural, too.

But it was neither the pallor nor the gravity which made one familiar with him look again and more intently.

An air of distrustful weariness; about the reticent, square-cut mouth a bitterness usually foreign to it; in the dark eyes a shadow—an infinite sadness.

A key scraped in the lock. He did not even lift his head.

What mattered who came—what they said? What mattered anything, since she had failed him?

A man—tall, brown-bearded, rather heavily built, a light grey overcoat buttoned across his breast, a high silk hat, impeccable glores—the Earl of Silverdale.

"Lionel."

Now he looked up—nodded.

The new-comer was a daily visitor.

"Any news?"

Lionel gave a short laugh and pitched his book into the opposite corner.

"How could I hear any?"

My lord sat down on the dingy wooden table, and held his cane across his knee with both hands.

He thought that by this time to-morrow, when, as now, the yellow sunset radiance would be slanting from the walls, Lionel Curzon would be either a free man or be branded with the mark of Cain.

The same thought passed through the mind of his companion, but neither spoke.

Where had all the lad's nonchalant serenity gone? Lord Silverdale wondered.

Calmer he was as ever, just as contained, but so silent, so gloomy.

Was he learning the meaning of fear? No! Lionel would never comprehend the cowardice of that word.

Was it being immured so closely, he who had been accustomed to such a supremely free and joyous life, which brought that cloud to his handsome brow?

Or was it the horror of bearing such a stigma which was weighing him down at last? None of these—not one.

As for the Earl himself, who shall say how that haughty heart of his was torn?

On first discovering his wife's sin he had resolved to shield her, no matter who else suffered.

A few hours later, when in her boudoir, the motive for that crime flashed upon him; then and later, when he saw her face at the casement of Ivy Tower, did he decide to mete out justice to her—justice only.

But now, when the dreaded day was almost here, recalling the girl he had loved and married, beset by tender memories of her whose head had been pillowed so often and so trustfully upon his bosom, seeing how delicate, how fragile she had grown, his heart failed him.

He had promised to love, to cherish, to protect her! How was he about to keep that vow? By turning her over to a gaping mob; by allowing her to be dragged from her proud

home, from her own fireside to the gaol, the dock, the—

He could think no farther.

He leaped off the table. He commenced striding up and down the bare little room.

He would not!

He was treacherous to Lionel? Yes.

And unutterably debased by his last decision? Yes, again.

And criminal himself in thus allowing an innocent man to suffer while screening the guilty? Yes, yes, yes!

All along he had told himself if he could only make up his mind finally as to the right, a certain content—peace would come to him.

He had done so. He was never more racked in spirit.

Obstinately, Lionel had refused to talk with him concerning the murder. Indeed, the subject was one the Earl himself was chary of discussing.

But even informally, casually, as he knew the accused had spoken to others, he never spoke to him.

Was it possible, could it be possible, that he divined—had reason to suspect the truth?

My lord stood still.

"Lionel!"

"Well?"

He would sound him.

"I recollected just now a story of a certain young Curzon—an ancestor of yours."

"Yes," indifferently.

He was not thinking of his lordship, of the tradition referred to, nor of the probable outcome of the trial to-morrow.

He was wondering how all her days would go by—and if ever a thought, of her many, would wing its way back to him.

Meredith's aching plaint resounded through his heart and soul:

"Dying—and where is she?"

Dancing divinely, perchance, or over her soft harp strings

Using the past to give pathos to the little new song she sings."

"His name was Victor Curzon," pursued his lordship. "He served in a famous battle. One of his companions, his dearest friend, committed some military offence, was sentenced to death. Your quixotic young progenitor bribed the guards to allow him to take the place of the condemned man. In the dulness of a winter dawn he was led out—shot to death. His friend had been spirited many miles away. Not till months after, in a new and happy home, did he receive his pardon, with the story of its price. Lionel, are you doing now as he did—giving your life, perhaps, for a friend?"

The young head was upthrown. The old gay smile curved the prisoner's lips. The old quizzical laughter came back to the bold brown eyes.

"Ah, my lord, you do me too much honour! Have you forgotten the age of chivalry is past?"

The Earl drew a long, relieved breath.

He had no suspicion then. All the mellow sunset shimmer was gone now. The darkness had not yet sent out its silent sentinels.

"News, Lionel!"

Neither had heard the coming footsteps.

With a bang and clatter the door was flung back.

A gentleman—an old gentleman—rushed excitedly in, up to Curzon, dealt him a kindly but staggering blow on the chest.

"Confound it, you young dog!" he shouted. "I knew you were shielding someone. But I never dreamed—I swear I didn't—that it was the Countess of Silverdale!"

Lionel was breathless.

They had found her out. That was his first, his only thought.

My lord swung round at sound of the name uttered so triumphantly by Francis Vale.

That individual was standing, his hands on his hips, his hat on the back of his head, exultance in every wrinkle of his coat, every bristling hair in his fierce moustache.

"Lord Silverdale!"

His jaw dropped.

He had not observed the presence of the Earl when he rushed in so impetuously.

Now he was staggered at confronting him. Not afraid, not dismayed. He simply felt as any well-bred man would, the delicacy of the situation in which he found himself.

His lordship bowed gravely.

A moment of silence, unbearable in its intensity.

Lionel took one step forward.

"You must be mad, Vale!" he said.

Mr. Vale's eyes snapped; so did his tongue for the matter of that.

"Am I? Well, then, certain evidence is mad, and we have a fair share of that same."

The Earl's glance was fixed on him in fever of apprehension.

But, as before, it was Curzon who spoke.

"What evidence?"

Mr. Vale took his hands off his hips, straightened his hat, and set his lips stubbornly.

"I shan't give you another chance of comparing me to a March hare, my lad. The evidence? Wait and find out!"

And with that the peppery old fellow buttoned up his coat, took off his hat in a painfully polite bow, faced around, and straight as a ramrod on wheels strode to the door—passed out.

Lionel gave one glance toward the portal, then laughed.

"Phew! Combustible, isn't he? And yet the best of friends!"

He went over to the corner, picked up the book he had slung there, returned with it, and sat down.

Still as one of the mailed knights in his own hall, my lord stood, just as he had turned to Mr. Vale.

"Lionel, lad," hoarsely, in his tone a great tenderness, "what if—that which he said—were—"

"It must be almost seven, Lord Silverdale. I know you dine at eight. And what would Mrs. Vere say if the soup were cold? Awful thought! Ride hard, your lordship, and Heaven speed you!"

He laughed again—a good, clear, ringing laugh, which showed his firm, white teeth.

He rose and held out his hand with the unconscious princely grace which many a man had envied him.

"Good-night, my lord!"

The words were a dismissal.

In silence the Earl clasped and wrung that proffered hand, in silence went out, mounted his horse, and went homeward.

And in the cell he had quitted the lonely occupant lay prone upon the floor, his forehead pressed upon his folded arms.

Thank Heaven, he was alone again! He could not have stood it much longer.

When Vale had dashed in with that voice, word of reprieve, how his heart had bounded! But even if he could go forth to-night proven innocent—

What then?

She had doubted, condemned, forsaken him with the rest. What, after all, did the wide world hold for him after this?

Dusk crept in—crept in. The corners were full of gloom. A heavy tread—a key-click—a gleam.

Again silence. The turnkey had entered, deposited a candle on the table—gone away.

Sweet and fresh, through grated space above, swept into the dreary room the breath of the April night.

During the afternoon the lawyers employed by Mr. Vale had been with him. Newspaper men had presented themselves. A few old friends had sent up their cards.

The town was filled with strangers, they told him. All the hotels were crammed. The case had attracted universal attention. The trial promised to be the most interesting ever known in Sussex.

He had listened, smiled quietly, and said nothing.

(Continued on page 380.)

EILEEN'S ROMANCE

By FLORENCE HODGKINSON

Author of "Vernon's Destiny," "Ivy's Peril," "Royal's Promise," etc., etc.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

In the prologue we are introduced to Lady Helen Percy, who is alone in her boudoir, playing with her little son, when she is startled by the unceremonious entrance of a woman who turns out to be the first wife of her husband. The shock was too much for Lady Helen, and although she lingered for some months, never recovered. Henceforward, John Percy, the millionaire is dead to the world, and only cares for the son she left behind her.

Lucy Courtenay is engaged to Alan Ernestoff, and both families heartily approve of the match. They are spending August at Boulogne. Among other visitors are Mr. Desmond and his two daughters, Maude and Eileen.

Mr. Desmond has fallen desperately in love with Maude Desmond, and takes his friend Basil Courtenay into his confidence. While on the sands one morning Eileen strays beyond her depth, and is in danger of drowning, when Basil rescues her, an incident that has far-reaching effects for him.

Mr. Desmond has now become Lord Desmond through the death of his father, and they have taken up their residence at Desmondville, Yorkshire. Maude Desmond does all she can to suppress her sister Eileen. Lord Desmond is too weak to interfere. There is living at the lodge at the gates of Desmondville a Mrs. Venn, who pays for the privilege, and it is evident has an object in so doing.

CHAPTER IX.



DAM GOLDSMITH left Vivian Court with a strange sense of disappointment, which he could hardly have explained to anyone. The wealthy banker had a heart as warm and as sensitive as though he had not been for the last ten or fifteen years a man of the world, with no one to question his will, and the power of gratifying every taste for luxury and pleasure.

Those who knew him best—not his hosts of acquaintances, but the few admitted to his real intimacy—always declared that Adam Goldsmith had the kindest heart, the widest generosity, they ever met.

Women declared no tale of sorrow ever failed to move him, and that his purse was always ready to open at the appeal of the needy.

Men called him a "right down good fellow," and year by year the question was asked with more astonishment, why in the world did he not marry?

Never man more free to make his own choice, since he had no relations to consult. His wealth was so great that the most ambitious father would have been content to give him his daughter; while his moral character, his known worth, would have satisfied the most anxious of mothers.

If he had been called on to answer the question himself—if fate had forced him to give a serious explanation of his conduct—society would have been electrified, for the truth would have been somewhat on this wise—he believed marriage by far the happiest state, and he fully hoped some day to enter on it.

He had only been deterred hitherto because he had never yet met a girl he deemed capable of the sacrifice his wife must make.

Most people would have set him down as a madman had they heard this statement, which, nevertheless, was the true reason of his celibacy.

He had never forgotten the last day of his father's life—the father who had seemed to live only for his boy, and who had died when Adam was a lad of twenty-four, not so much of old age as of a broken heart, whose wounds his riches were powerless to heal.

"Never let this story pass your lips, Adam," had been the dying charge, "until you see the woman you wish to make your wife, then in justice to her it must be told. If she loves you, my boy, as I loved your mother, never fear it will change her feelings."

But to Adam Goldsmith's sensitive nature the blow was a terrible one. To him it seemed that the revelation he was bound to make before he married must make any woman refuse to be his wife.

He never thought of hiding the secret that had been kept so well. His promise to his father, and his own sense of honour, alike forbade the bare idea; but for years it seemed to him easier to remain a bachelor all his life than to impart to another the cloud which hung over him.

Then he fell in with the Vivians, and felt for the gentle Countess almost a son's affection. He had known very few women intimately, and those mostly German matrons.

Lady Vivian was a revelation to him, his friendship for her a new era in his life.

The Earl smiled, and told his wife she had made a conquest of the heart deemed impregnable. She only shook her head, and said Adam Goldsmith reminded her of her favourite sister, who died when she herself was a mere child.

The Earl declared it was fancy. Adam Goldsmith was a good fellow, but remarkably plain. The idea of his resembling Lady Helen Percy, who had been the belle of two London seasons, was absurd.

Still, as he worshipped his wife, he did not interfere with her protégé. Indeed, he liked the young banker, and grew in time very fond of him, so that Mr. Goldsmith was at all times welcomed at the Vivians' town house as well as at the Court, and so it came about that he saw a great deal of the Earl's only child.

May was a slip of a girl, much occupied with German verbs, when he first made her acquaintance.

Three years later she was presented at Court and fairly launched in the gaieties of a London season, and Adam learned his secret then. He loved her. He hid his feelings well, regarding their gratification as simply impossible.

Lord Vivian was one of the proudest men in London. His daughter was a beauty, and an heiress.

Even had Adam Goldsmith been all the world deemed him in point of eligibility, the peer might well have looked higher for his child, or so it seemed to the modest banker. As it was, his passion was miserable presumption, and must be crushed.

But the crushing was hard work. Over and over again he prepared himself to hear of his idol's engagement. Over and over again he believed her on the point of marriage; but Lady May was "difficile," and sent away her suitors.

Poor Adam felt as though the long, wearing suspense, the trial of constant intercourse with such a secret to conceal, was almost beyond his efforts; and at last the idea came to him he should be happier if he himself raised an insuperable barrier between himself and May by marrying someone else.

It was the strangest idea, but Adam Goldsmith was quixotic. He loved Lady May Delaval, but honour, so he thought, forbade him telling her so. After her parents' kindness to him, could he reward them by seeking to persuade their heiress to marry him, with his miserable secret? But there must surely be women in the world to whom his wealth, his affection, his protection and companionship, would atone for that one blot.

It seemed to him, when he was introduced to Maude Desmond, he had at last found the woman for his wife.

He did not love her as he loved May, but he thought her "a dear little thing," thoroughly taken in by her infantile appearance, by her

pretty speeches. He regarded her as an innocent, guileless child, burdened by an extravagant father and a hoyden sister.

It was a revelation to him when he met Lord Desmond, and recognised in him the hero of the forged cheque at Hamburg; but that would not have changed his views.

It was when Maude looked into his face and told him she did not believe in marriages that involved sacrifices that he put aside his plans.

That same evening he saw Eileen, and knew how cruelly untrue was the description Maude had given of her little sister.

Possessed of a good memory, now that as knew the Desmonds for the same family he had met at Hamburg, it was easy for him to piece out their history.

Eileen's likeness to the sweet girl-wife he so well remembered struck him at once. Maude must be the elder girl, taken possession of by her own mother's family, in which case she must be fair on the road to thirty, instead of the girl of eighteen he had fancied her.

Like all truthful men, he detested deceit, and his feelings for Miss Desmond quickly changed to repugnance and contempt.

"How very sudden!" said Lady May, when she heard of his intended departure. "Have we offended you, Mr. Goldsmith, that you leave us so hurriedly?"

May had tyrannised over him for some years. She always said he was her special friend, but she never suspected his love for her. Had she done so, she could not have behaved to him as she did, with as much frank unconsciousness as though he had been her elder brother.

The two were alone in the music-room. He was to leave by the early train the next morning. May was putting away some songs she had been trying.

"You have not offended me in the least," said Adam, quickly; "but I think it is better to go."

"You told mother important business took you to London?" said May, pointedly.

"I think 'important business' is a presentable excuse," he said, smiling. "I am always happier as Lady Vivian's guest than anywhere else, but—"

"Surely you have not proposed to the beauty and been refused? I confess it looks like it."

Goldsmith took courage.

"If you mean Miss Desmond, Lady May, I never intend to propose to her, and so—"

May nodded.

"So it is best to go away. I understand; but how disappointed mother will be. She really did think that at last she had found someone able to touch your stony heart."

"I deny that it is stony. I thought Miss Desmond charming until this afternoon."

May smiled.

"When you discovered how she had maligned that dear little sister. Well, I promised mother not to prejudice you, but I suppose now I may speak my mind? I regard Maude Desmond as the incarnation of deceit, and I should pity any man who married her."

"Well, I shall not come in for your pity."

"I am very glad to hear it," said May, quietly. "Mother takes a lot of trouble to find you a wife. I think she forgets how we shall miss you when you marry."

"Should you really miss me?"

"Awfully. You see, you seem in a measure to belong to us. Now, when you have a wife, naturally she will object to our monopoly, and we shall see less of you."

"But if you go to Blankshire—"

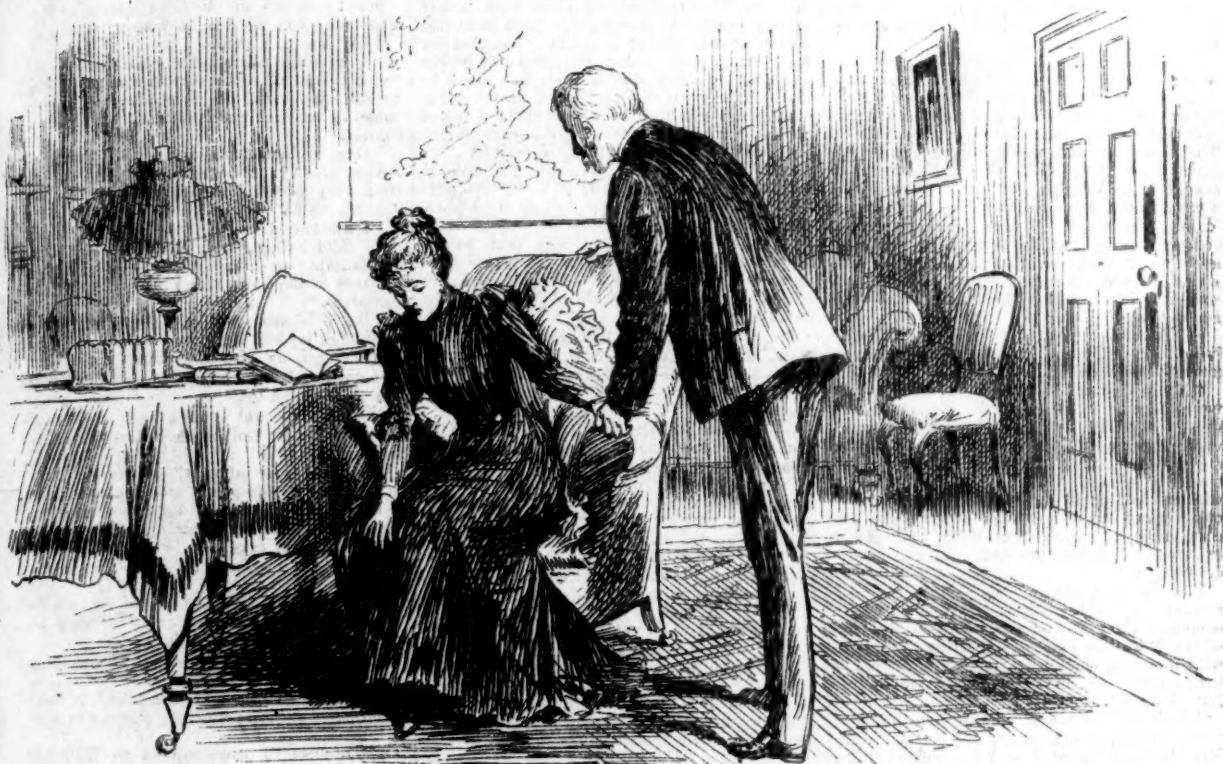
"I'm only going for my cousin's wedding. I shall not stay for the rest of my natural life."

"But if you live there?"

May was too frank to pretend ignorance.

"Oh! Mr. Goldsmith, I did think you were sensible. Surely you must see Basil and I are too friendly ever to want to be anything else!"

"I think your cousin is a sterling good



"IF ONLY YOU WOULD LET ME TRY TO HELP YOU," ADAM PLEADED. "CAN'T YOU TRUST ME?"

fellow. You might do worse than take pity on him."

May pouted.

"I am quite sure he will never ask me to. To let you into a little secret, Mr. Goldsmith, I believe poor Basil is hopelessly in love with that pretty Eileen Desmond. You know he saved her life at Boulogne, so it would be very natural."

"I made sure you would be his choice."

"You are nearly as anxious about my settlement as mother is about yours," said May, wickedly. "I suppose I ought to be grateful to you, but you know you carry it too far."

"I have known you seven years," said Adam, in an injured tone. "Surely I may feel some interest in your future?"

"But why need you connect that future inseparably with a wedding-ring? Father and mother are not particularly eager to get rid of their only child, and I am very happy at home, so you see you need not feel at all anxious about me. Even if I become an old maid, I shall survive it."

"You will never do that."

"I don't know. I am nearly twenty-three. When does one begin to be one?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"You might give me a hint," said May, laughing. "There is nothing of which I have a greater horror than 'old young ladies.' Whenever you think I have reached the age when one should retire gracefully from the ranks of 'demoiselles,' and take to poke bonnets, tracts, pug dogs, and the other recreation of professed spinsters, I wish you would let me know!"

"I think you absurd."

"Ah, but then you have so much sense. All I pray is that if I get very old I shall not grow like Mrs. Venn, Lord Desmond's lodge-keeper. She has fingers like claws and a skin as withered as parchment; in fact, if she had lived in olden times she must have been burnt for a witch."

"I don't think you are in any danger."

He was a little surprised as he drove to Whitby station the next day in Lord Vivian's dog-cart, when a woman came suddenly up, and waving her hand for him to stop without the least apology, began:—

"You are Mr. Adam Goldsmith, I think?"

The banker admitted his identity.

"Then you'll please take this letter and read it when you're alone."

It was a bulky package she handed to him. Adam put it in his pocket and drove on, for there was no time to spare if he meant to catch the train.

The groom who sat behind observed:—

"That's Mrs. Venn, sir, that lives in Lord Desmond's Lodge. She has mighty queer ways sometimes, but she's quite harmless."

"She looks a queer person," returned Adam. "Not in the least like a lodge-keeper."

"She's a sight of money, sir. Why, she keeps a decent servant-girl, and spends more on her garden than'd keep a family of children. It's just a whim of hers to live in the Lodge at Desmondville, that's all."

Adam Goldsmith was back in London, the strange sense of disappointment we have alluded to ever present. He was thankful he had discovered Maude Desmond's character in time, but none the less he was sorry she had not been all he pictured her. He was ever more and more afraid of the Vivians guessing his secret. From his last conversation with Lady May it was clear she had no idea of an early marriage. Unless he chose a wife he could not change the easy, familiar terms of his intimacy at the Court. He must go on bearing his burden as best he could.

Not until he was in his own room did he open the pocket so strangely confided to his care. He found it contained several papers. The first he took up was a letter addressed to himself.

"Sir,—I am a lone widow woman, without a

creature near me I can trust. When my husband died I made a will, but his family were so angry at my enjoying all his wealth that they might do their best to upset it, though I hardly see how that could benefit them. I have often heard of you, and I know you are kind-hearted and just. I have made a new will, and named you as the sole executor. You are so rich, you will surely spare the time it may take you to arrange my affairs; and it is not for my sake I ask, but for the poor child to whom I have left my money. She will not have to wait for it long, since I am turned eighty. Sir, I know more of you than you think. I knew your father well; I have met your mother, the sweetest woman save one I ever saw. Mr. Goldsmith, I know the true story of your father's life, and how he lost your mother.

"I know, too, the secret you are bound to tell to any girl you seek to marry, and on this knowledge I venture to give you a word of advice—do not seek to wed either of Lord Desmond's daughters. The eldest is false to the core, and would make you miserable; and the younger is not for you; the fates have said it. When Eileen Desmond marries she will want love, and love you have not to give her. There is trouble before her—heavy trouble. If ever future were marked by a black line it is that child's. Be good to her if she crosses your path, for she will sorely need a friend; and she has a claim on you no one in this world knows of except myself. I shall keep your secret, and you will grant my prayer.—Yours truly, MARTHA VENN, widow of Joseph Venn, some time of Hamburg."

The three other papers were each done up separately and sealed. One was endorsed, "The Last Will and Testament of Martha Venn." Another, "For my heiress"; while the last bore a longer inscription, "For Mr. Adam Goldsmith, to be read at my death, or when I request him to do so."

The banker locked all the papers carefully in his desk, and then sat for some time musing by the fire.

"Is the woman a magician to guess my secrets? Nay, what a fool I am to think such things! But it does seem uncanny. Poor Eileen Desmond! That part of the letter I can understand—she has a claim on you. That means her fate is like mine; her mother suffered as mine did. Well, I am ready enough to help the poor child if ever she needs a friend, but how can this Mrs. Venn have learned the rest? I understood my father expressly he had confided in no living creature, not even his lawyers. Ha! as a terrible suspicion crossed his mind, 'can she be that woman? Is it possible she has survived both her victims?'"

He put one hand across his head as though to still its pain, and then continued his musings unconsciously aloud.

"My father would have been ninety this very year had he been spared. Mrs. Venn expressly says she is turned eighty. It sounds as if—it must be!" he groaned, almost in the anguish of the thought. "And yet, what right have I to be hard on her? My father told me with his last breath he blamed himself for his own neglect in taking things for granted; but then she calls herself Mrs. Venn, and affects an interest in Eileen Desmond. It is a bewildering letter."

But the next morning he remembered his servant, an old taciturn Englishman, who combined the offices of valet and major domo of the handsome suite of chambers, had been with him long enough to remember his Hamburg sojourn, and might throw some light upon Mrs. Venn's history.

"Andrew," he asked, as the factotum was deftly cutting his master's newspaper, while Mr. Goldsmith poured out his coffee. "Do you remember anything of a Mrs. Venn? She has written to say she knew me at Hamburg."

Andrew was equal to the emergency.

"Surely I do, Mr. Adam; the history was too strange to be forgotten. Joseph Venn, the merchant, had kept single till he had turned sixty, and all his relations—a needy crew—were furious when he married. I never heard the lady's name; but some said he had known her as a boy. She was as old as him, or older, and nothing to look at. The Venns declared she was an evil-minded, scheming creature; but she was good to the old man the few months he lived, and he left her all he had."

"And the relations interfered?"

"They tried to upset the will, but they couldn't. Mrs. Venn never visited anyone, but she gave away lots of things. I mind well that when young Mrs. Desmond (wife to the gentleman we met at Vivian Court, I knew him again in a second) lay, as they said, dying, Mrs. Venn sent her a lot of things; though I don't believe a creature knew where they came from. Mrs. Venn had just a craze after young Mrs. Desmond, though I don't believe she had ever spoken to her in her life."

The strangest suspicion came to Mr. Goldsmith. He knew the rumours afloat at the time of Noel Desmond's second marriage as to his wife's birth. Could it be possible that she was Mrs. Venn's child? The idea seemed feasible. That would explain to him every line of her letter.

"She left Hamburg after her husband's death, I suppose, Andrew?"

"She did, sir; she wasn't there over a year in all. I mind well the commotion in the Venn family when the news of the marriage came."

"I must have heard of it, but it has quite slipped my memory."

"You wouldn't be likely to heed gossip, sir, at that time. The master hadn't been a week in his grave when old Venn brought home his bride."

Andrew retreated, and Adam Goldsmith pushed aside his untasted breakfast.

"Well, it seems clear enough; she must be the woman who caused us all such grievous wrong. I know my father believed her dead,

and she has actually outlived him nearly twenty years. Poor soul, she must have had sorrow enough in her long life! No need for me to bring more on her by refusing to be her executor. I don't suppose she has much to leave, but it will make a slender provision for that pretty child. She need not have asked me to be kind to her if our paths crossed, for I pitied her from the first. I wonder how much the legacy will represent? I hope it will be enough to make little Eileen independent of her sister. Of course, I have no proof the heiress is Eileen Desmond, but at least everything points to that. Mr. Venn passed for a rich man, but his widow must have spent something in all these years. Still, if there be only four thousand pounds it will save the child from poverty."

Mr. Goldsmith went to Germany that very week, and was absent more than a month. When he returned to Clarges Street Lord and Lady Vivian were in town, and November had fairly set in.

"We shall be here till the week before Christmas," said the Countess, "then we go home. You had better make up your mind to come with us. My niece and her husband will be among our guests, but I suppose you do not carry your aversion to matrimony so far as to object to meet a bride."

"I will meet Mrs. Alan Ernest with pleasure. I remember I used to think Miss Courtenay charming."

"Well, she has a younger sister just as charming, but you need not fear an attack on your heart. My sister-in-law's daughters are not wilful girls like mine. Lucy and Alan began their courtship at ten and fifteen, which sounds early enough, but report has it that Dolly won her future husband at the mature age of five. Not that they are engaged as yet, only it is one of those affairs that are certain to be."

"So it is only kind to warn me."

"Not that you need warning. I think you and May have both made up your minds to vex me."

"I am sure I have not, and I always think of Lady May as a perfect daughter."

The Countess shook her head.

"Lucy and Dolly are perfect daughters. I am not mercenary or ambitious, but it must be charming to have girls who fall in love with just the men one would like them to."

"Depend upon it," said Goldsmith, kindly, "Lady Constance Courtenay has her troubles. Perhaps her sons are not so dutiful as their sisters."

"May is coming home in December," resumed the Countess. "Basil is to bring her when he rejoins his regiment. Who do you think has been staying quite near my sister? That dear little Maude Desmond I am so fond of."

Adam quite understood what was expected of him.

"I hope she is well."

"She has won all hearts down there. I assure you that girl would make a perfect wife, and one or two people seem to think so."

"Then you will have a chance of being kind," said Adam, gravely, "by insisting on having the wedding at Vivian Court. Mind you invite me. I will act as best man with the greatest pleasure."

But the Countess found her plans upset. November was not over when she got a hurried telegram from her daughter.

"I return to-day, and Dorothy with me. Come to meet us at Waterloo at six, and mind you seem delighted to see Dolly. She wants petting."

Surely never was such a confidential, perplexing message flashed across the wires! It found Lord Vivian unable to stir from gout, and his wife too anxious to leave him long enough to drive to Waterloo and back. She sent off a servant for Adam Goldsmith.

"Of course I will meet Lady May and her cousin with pleasure," said Adam, readily. "I'm afraid I can't undertake the petting, for the Countess had shown him the telegram,

"but I can do my best to convince Mrs. Courtenay you are delighted to welcome her."

Lady Vivian sighed.

"I am afraid there is something wrong. My sister-in-law is rather ceremonious. I am certain she would never let one of her girls come to me uninvited without some urgent reason!"

"One of her model daughters," corrected Adam, gravely. "But perhaps Lady May has been very pressing in her entreaties for her cousin's visit."

"I am sure I will do my best to make the dear child happy; but, Mr. Goldsmith, London is empty and terribly dull; besides, I am a prisoner to the house, for the Earl hates to be left alone."

"Don't be anxious," said Adam, as simply as though he had been her own son. "I am quite sure Lady May can amuse her cousin; and now, if I am really to be at Waterloo in time, I must be off."

It was a general remark that, considering his wealth, Mr. Goldsmith had very unostentatious habits.

He could have afforded any extravagance in the way of equipages, but contented himself with a cab of most unpretentious style, though the horse that drew it was the admiration of all the masculine world. A pair of riding horses completed his possessions in that line.

He always declared the cab was ample accommodation for himself, and that when he had guests it was easy to hire.

Lady Vivian's own brougham was waiting now to take him to the station. The Countess was so used to rely upon her friend that she had ordered it even before she sent her message to him.

Mr. Goldsmith drove rapidly to Waterloo, and perhaps it was rather strange that he should think of the last morning he sat behind Lady Vivian's horses, and the strange application that had been made to him.

Mrs. Venn's papers had been carefully locked up, and Adam tried to forget they were in his possession; but he could not but reflect, as he drove to the station, that fate seemed determined to improve his acquaintance with the Desmonds.

He would naturally see a great deal of Lady May and Miss Courtenay, whom he understood had been in daily intercourse with Maude Desmond; and if Lady Vivian repented her invitation, it seemed likely he would spend his Christmas at the Court, within a walk of their home.

It was passing strange that, without any desire of his own, circumstances seemed to work together to throw him in Mrs. Venn's neighbourhood.

Only just in time, as a porter obsequiously told him when he alighted. The train from Little Waterton was due already, and would be in in two minutes.

Adam walked quickly to the platform pointed out, followed by the footman, who was to receive his young lady's luggage and return with it in a cab.

Mr. Goldsmith had told Lady Vivian her daughter's telegram need not alarm her; but in the brief moments he had to wait he reflected that this sudden return was utterly unlike May.

Erratic in tastes, and often expressing the most unusual opinions, May had yet a wonderful consideration for other people. To appear at home a full month before she was expected—to bring a cousin with her without even consulting her mother—was not in the least like May.

He had begun to feel her ladyship's anxiety infectious, when the train steamed slowly into the station.

It was very long, having received additions at more than one junction; but the first thing he saw was May Delaval's face leaning out of the carriage window, and eagerly watching the people waiting on the platform, as though looking for her mother.

"I am sorry to say Lady Vivian is not here," said Adam, going up to the door; "she has sent me to bring you home, and to tell Miss Courtenay nothing but the Earl's having a bad attack of gout should have kept her from coming in person to welcome her niece."

May's face grew so grave that he added—

"Indeed you need not be anxious. Lord Vivian is no worse than I have often seen him, but you know when he is ill he can never bear your mother out of his sight."

"I know; have you the carriage here?"

"Yes. Where is Miss Courtenay?" for May was standing so as to hide everyone else in the compartment. "And is not your maid with you?"

"I have left my maid in Blankshire. Mr. Goldsmith, shall you be very much shocked at what I have done? I have run away!"

Adam stared at her in blank amazement. A porter came up and opened the door. May sprang out, and said to her friend—

"You had better take Dolly to the carriage; and, oh! Mr. Goldsmith, be very careful of her."

He leaped on to the step and looked in. At the other end of the seat, half propped up by pillows, reclined a tiny, childish figure with large dreamy, grey eyes, which, in spite of the difference in the colour, reminded him of Basil Courtenay's. The face was pale and thin, and a kind of nameless terror was stamped on it. She put one of her little thin hands out in greeting; and Adam Goldsmith took it as reverently as though she had been a queen.

"I am afraid you have been ill?" he said, gently. "I am a very old friend of your cousin's, Miss Courtenay, and I hope you will let me welcome you to London."

The child smiled wistfully and appealed to May.

"You are sure it is safe," she whispered; "he does not come from her."

May bent over her tenderly.

"My darling, it is perfectly safe. Mr. Goldsmith is true as steel, and she is a hundred miles away"; then turning to the banker, "she is terribly weak, poor child; I don't believe she can walk a yard."

Adam settled that by taking up the little lady and carrying her in his arms to the waiting brougham. With the privilege of wealth May left the luggage to the footman, and followed her cousin.

"May I come with you?" asked the banker, diffidently. "The Countess invited me to dinner, but perhaps, as Miss Courtenay is so unwell, you had rather be alone."

"Please come," answered May, frankly. "I have a great deal to say to you," and the invalid's soft, grey eyes seemed to endorse the invitation, so he came.

"Tell them to drive slowly," commanded Lady May. "I meant to have told mother everything going home, but as she is not here and father is ill, perhaps I had better tell you instead. Look at Dolly!"

Adam expostulated.

"You forget Miss Courtenay is a stranger to me," he said gently. "I can see she seems very much out of health, but I am sure she would not like me to accept your invitation, and try to judge her symptoms by her face."

"A month ago she was as well as I am," cried May; "now, weren't you, Dolly? And now she can hardly walk across the room, and seems frightened at every strange face. My uncle and aunt declared that there was nothing the matter with her but fancy. No one would believe me but Basil; and, being a man, he could do no good, so I just took the law into my own hands. We were all invited to a grand wedding to-day. We should have been away from the Hall till five o'clock. I told my aunt I would stay and take care of Dolly. As soon as they were gone I hunted up Bradshaw, found out the next train, sent my own maid for a cab (the carriage was at the wedding), bundled Dolly into it, and came off."

Mr. Goldsmith looked bewildered.

"What do you expect Sir Bryan and Lady Constantine to say to you?"

"I believe my aunt in her heart will be very

grateful. She has begun to get anxious, only it is part of her creed always to see with Sir Bryan's eyes. I have left a note for Basil, telling him what I have done, and I know he will be glad."

"And what do you say, Miss Courtenay?" asked Adam, gently. "Were you willing to be spirited away in this sudden fashion?"

Dolly shivered.

"I am so tired," she said, feebly. "Mother kept saying I was to rouse myself, only I couldn't; and I was so frightened that it seemed like Heaven when May said we should come away."

The carriage stopped in Park Lane. The housekeeper, who had been May's nurse, stood in the hall and took in the state of affairs at once.

"We'll soon have you well, Miss Dorothy," she said, cheerfully. "I'm a rare hand at taking care of sick folks, and Lady May is so strong she never gives me a chance. You let me take you upstairs; there's a beautiful fire in your room, and the Countess will be there in a minute."

She took possession of Dolly as though she had been a child; and Adam Goldsmith, seeing from May's face she wanted to speak to him alone, followed her to a little morning room at the end of the hall. He thought he had had surprises enough for one day, but yet another awaited him. May Delaval, whom he had never seen anything but cheerful, whom he believed well-nigh incapable of grief, cried as though her heart would break.

"My dear child!"

It was not in the least what he meant to say, but the words rose to his lips and forced their way. May tried to smile, but the smile vanished in a sob.

"If only you would tell me what is the matter," pleaded Adam. "If only you would let me try to help you. Can't you trust me?"

"Better than anyone," said May, drying her tears by an effort; "but you are a man, and men don't understand. You will only laugh at me."

"Try me!"

"Well, listen! When I went to my uncle's, a few weeks ago, Dolly was just the life of the house, a kind of living sunbeam. She appeared in perfect health, could walk miles, and seemed so well and strong that I almost laughed at Lucy, because, when she went away on her wedding tour she made Basil promise to take care of her dear little sister."

"My dear Lady May, I assure you people may seem perfectly well one month and yet show signs of great delicacy the next!"

"I thought you would say something like that!" said May, indignantly. "Men never understand!"

Adam bore the snub patiently.

"I tell me everything, and let me judge."

"Well, then, people don't get to look as Dolly looks now without cause. You admit that?"

"Certainly! Perhaps she caught cold?"

May stamped her foot.

"How like a man! She did nothing of the kind. There was a young man she had known all her life, whom everyone imagined meant to marry her."

"I know," said Mr. Goldsmith, again interrupting. "Your mother told me the other day it was as good as an engagement. Young Westwood, wasn't it?"

"Yes! Do you know him?"

"A little. He is a famous fellow. He—"

"He is a heartless deceiver," declared May, "and you can tell him I said so! At the wedding he seemed just to worship Dolly. He never took his eyes off her. I'm sure I thought he was in love with her, and that he would propose at once!"

"And didn't he?"

May looked indignant.

"The next day he had quite changed. He never spoke a word to her, and he apologised to my aunt for leaving the Hall, but said his

mother wanted him [I don't believe it]; so he went over to the Towers, the Erncliffe place close by and actually never even said good-bye to Dolly!"

"Well!"

"I don't consider it well," said May, frigidly. "In a few days we heard he was going to Algiers. He met my uncle out-of-doors and apologised for not calling, because he was busy. I told Basil if I were he I would have shot him!"

"What did your cousin say?"

"That as his father was Cyril Westwood's heir-at-law, he didn't see his way to, but he was as disgusted as I was."

"And she began to fade away then?"

"She did not," said Lady May, angrily. "She is far too nice to fret about a man like that. She was quite well when Lady Constantine and Sir Bryan invited a young lady to whom they had taken a most insane fancy to come and stay at the Hall."

"And Miss Courtenay did not like the guest?"

"Miss Courtenay was as infatuated as her parents. Basil told her once he thought her new friend a dangerous ally, and I implored her to be careful. Mr. Goldsmith, I am only a girl. I have not had a learned education. You were brought up in Germany, and you must know something of mysterious sciences. Tell me, is there any dread power by which one mind can so get another under its influence as to be able to work its own will without remonstrance or resistance from its victim?"

"I don't understand you. There is mesmerism, of course, and animal magnetism; but—"

"I believe firmly," cried May Delaval, "that some cruel influence has been practised on poor Dolly. For days the child has had no will, no power of her own. She seems as though possessed by some hidden, nameless dread, and I believe she has been laid under a spell."

Mr. Goldsmith looked thoughtful.

"There are such things," he said, slowly; "but I have never believed in a case happening such as you discuss without the consent of the victim."

"I tell you the child was fascinated by her! She seemed quite infatuated by her new friend. My uncle and aunt were immensely taken with the stranger. Mr. Goldsmith," said May, slowly, "I believe she has some power which makes indifference to her impossible. You must hate and fear her, or else be subject in greater or less degree to her spell. Of the people I have seen with her, Basil, his sister Lucy, and myself are the only ones who resisted her influence. My uncle and aunt, poor Dolly herself, the Erncliffe and their younger son, are all more or less infatuated."

"But, supposing this so, what had she— you have not told me the lady's name—to gain by acquiring this power over your cousin? and how comes it that Miss Dorothy's admiration has changed into this nervous terror?"

May hesitated.

"Might it not be that while under her influence poor Dolly had been induced to do or say something which, in her own character, she would bitterly repent?"

"Perhaps. Such things have been."

"I think it is this. Once awakened to what she had done, the poor child tried to break the fatal chains that bound her. Her mind was freed from the spell, but her body suffered. She has just grown weaker and weaker ever since. If she threatens to tell her parents or anyone of her sorrow, I believe this fiend—I can't use milder words—frightens her into submission."

"But her parents? No mother could be blind."

"Sir Bryan is devoted to his guest, and terms poor Dolly's illness 'fancy.' Her mother thinks she is fretting for Cyril Westwood, and, being a very proud woman, resents the weakness. Do you know, Mr. Goldsmith, that child wanted someone to sleep in her room because

she felt nervous, and the request was refused? The siren then said it was unkind, and offered her company. Dolly had to submit, and this morning she looked as one whose spirit had all gone. Do you wonder I took the law into my hands?"

"Not at all; but I do wonder at the parents."

"They are very fond of her, but they are intensely proud. They think she is fretting after Mr. Westwood, and are too angry to see it's bodily illness that has changed her so. Ah!" as the soft rustle of a woman's dress came to her ear, "here is mother. She will believe me."

"I believe every word you have said," returned Mr. Goldsmith, gravely. "But you have forgotten one thing—perhaps you made the reservation purposely. You have not told me the name of the woman you suspect of this cruel wickedness."

"Not suspect," corrected May. "I am certain of her work! I may never bring her guilt home to her; but, all the same, I know that Dolly's heightened happiness, perhaps ruined health, lies at her door!"

"Her name," pleaded Mr. Goldsmith, "if I am to help you? Tell me that."

May looked full into his face and answered—"Maude Desmond!"

CHAPTER X.

Adam Goldsmith had no time to express his surprise or bewilderment at Lady May's extraordinary statement. The name of the woman against whom she had brought such a terrible accusation had hardly left her lips when the Countess of Vivian entered, an uneasy expression on her face, and a troubled look in her eyes, even while she fondly kissed her daughter.

Mr. Goldsmith had a son's reverence for the gentle lady. He had admired her perfect sympathy with Lady May in many things, and yet he managed even, as she came into the room, to telegraph a glance of warning to the young heiress.

Adam was the last person in the world to seek to destroy the confidence between mother and daughter. But he did know that Maude Desmond enjoyed no ordinary share of Lady Vivian's favour; and he thought a premature avowal of May's fears would only estrange her mother's affections from poor little Dorothy.

He himself was too bewildered to form a judgment on the beautiful siren whom May condemned. He was a man, and thus not insensible to Maude's exquisite face; but even in the days when he had thought she would make him a desirable wife he had never felt an iota of love for her. He had deemed it a duty to marry, the only remedy for the hopeless passion that consumed him. He had thought of Maude, because he knew she would appreciate all he could give her—wealth, fashion, luxury—and had believed her nature was one that could well dispense with the gift he was powerless to offer her—love. But even when he had thought of making her his wife, there were times when she puzzled him. When he had seen her father and sister, when he had heard from her own lips her opinion of romantic marriages, a great revulsion came, and he felt he would not have proposed to her to save his life.

Disenchanted, he had studied the beautiful siren closely, and he realised that May's judgment was quite true. Very few people were indifferent to Maude Desmond; she either fascinated them completely, as in the case of Lord and Lady Vivian; or she inspired them with an intense aversion, as she had done Lady May; or she ruled over them by sheer force of will, as she did over her little sister.

Fond of their daughter as the Vivians were, they would decidedly object to the denouncing their favourite protégée without ample proof; and, as yet, it seemed to Adam the accusation rested only on Lady May's own prejudice.

He could not for the life of him understand Miss Desmond's influence with the Countess. He knew Lady Vivian had disliked Maude's mother exceedingly, and been prepared to distrust her child. Yet in that one visit to the Court Maude had so won his heart that though her natural kindness made her welcome little Eileen for May's sake, she had never been able to care for her daughter's favourite, and always seemed to think any attentions shown her as a lack of fealty to her sister.

May saw the warning glance, and understood. At twenty-two she was more thoughtful than many women of mature age, and she had seen, from the moment of leaving Courtenay Hall, her path was strewn with difficulties.

For her brother's sake Lady Courtenay would not disapprove of anything that had his authority. If he and his wife received Dolly as an invited guest, her parents would forgive the strange manner of her leaving home. But the least reluctance on the part of her hosts would make them so angry as to insist on her return.

May did not feel quite sure of her mother. If her eyes could be opened she knew she would take Dolly's side heart and soul; but the eager friend was ready to confess the said "opening" would be a work of difficulty, and she thought Adam Goldsmith's caution might be useful.

"You aren't vexed, are you, mamma?" said May, a little eagerly. "Dolly did want a change so badly, and I couldn't make Aunt Constance see she ailed anything particular."

"My dear," said the Countess, gently; "she looks like death. How in the world could her mother have let her take a journey in that state?"

"Uncle Bryan will have it she is only lazy, and wants rousing. I think Aunt Constance would have let her see a doctor but for him."

Lady Vivian looked bewildered.

"Do you really mean she has had no advice?"

"No. Mother, do write to Aunt Constance and say you are delighted to have Dolly, and she must stay ever so long. If you don't they will take offence, and be wanting her back directly."

Mr. Goldsmith struck in here with:

"Indeed, Lady Vivian, I think Miss Courtenay would have a far better chance of recovery here. Her disorder seems to me chiefly in the nerves, and what benefit could she gain from a country surgeon, who, I suppose, would be the best medical opinion to be had at Little Westerton? Besides, in these cases, change is everything. Depend upon it, with your doctor to prescribe and Mrs. Parkins to nurse and tyrannise over her, your little niece will soon be herself again."

"But if she dies?" faltered the Countess. "I am sure she looks like it, Constance and Sir Bryan would never forgive me. Why, Mr. Goldsmith, do you think I would let May stay away from me in that state?"

"But then, Lady May is an only child, and Miss Courtenay is one of seven. As to the responsibility, you can easily avoid that by informing Sir Bryan and Lady Constance if any change occurs for the worse. Depend upon it, it is kindest to keep Miss Courtenay where she can have quiet and good nursing."

Lady Vivian was completely vanquished. She sat down and wrote to her sister-in-law, saying how delighted she was to welcome Dorothy. She herself was so engrossed with her husband's illness, May would have had but a dull time without her cousin. She hoped Dolly might be spared from home for some weeks. She looked thin and pale; perhaps the change would make her stronger! Anyway, Lady Constance might rely on the dear girl being cared for as a child of their own, and her visit was a real pleasure to all of them.

The dinner that followed was rather hurried. Lady Vivian had to leave to go back to her husband as soon as the dessert was on the table.

When the door closed on her, and the footmen had relieved the diners from further

attendance, May turned to Mr. Goldsmith. In spite of four London seasons, she was so far from the prevailing bondage to etiquette that it never even struck her as strange that she and he should be tête-à-tête. Perhaps she regarded him as an elder brother—an adopted uncle—and so beyond the pale of possible suitors.

"What do you think about it?"

The banker waited a moment, and then said, slowly,

"I think, even if you are right about Miss Desmond, you had better keep your suspicions to yourself."

"Then you don't believe in them?"

Adam shook himself.

"I can't deny there have been cases of a person of strong will gaining such complete mastery over one of a weaker disposition that they could, if evilly disposed, use their powers in a very cruel manner. The whole world admits there have been such things. It is one of the favourite arguments brought forward by the opponents of mesmerism and animal magnetism, that, if abused, both can be used with shocking consequences; but, Lady May, you have not the slightest proof Miss Desmond possesses this strange, mysterious gift, nor do you know that, having it, she has practised it upon your cousin!"

"I feel sure of it!"

Adam sighed.

"But that is not a proof. Remember, there could be no adequate cause. Mesmerism, when used for an evil purpose, has generally some distinct end in view. Now, Miss Desmond and your cousin were perfect strangers a few weeks ago. Miss Courtenay has neither money nor influence. I quite fail to see what anyone could gain by reducing her to a state of subjection to their will."

May Delaval looked at him sharply.

"Men sin often for gold. Has it never struck you, Mr. Goldsmith, there is something else for which women err more readily. Don't you know that there is one thing, to gain which some women would stain their souls with any crime?"

"Love?"

"Yes. Miss Desmond was an utter stranger to my little cousin; but she was no stranger to the man Dorothy loved. They had been brought up together, had been thrown in constant, familiar companionship; in fact, it is no secret that Mrs. Westwood's darling wish was that her son should marry Miss Desmond."

A light broke upon Adam Goldsmith.

"I begin to understand. You think that by reducing your cousin to broken health and spirits, Miss Desmond might hope to make a breach between her and Mr. Westwood?"

"Not quite," said May, slowly. "I believe firmly that Cyril Westwood and Dorothy have been parted by some evil influence, and that that influence emanates from Maude Desmond."

"But they were not engaged?"

"I never said they were," retorted May, petulantly. "If they had been no one could have separated them, for she could have demanded an explanation. They loved each other—everyone knows that. It began when she was five, and has been going on ever since. My aunt sent her to school for a year, and their meeting when Cyril reached Courtenay Hall this time, after a year's absence, proved their feelings were unchanged. He haunted her like a shadow on Lucy's wedding day. I am certain he only wanted an opportunity to propose to her. The next morning he treated her as a stranger. Now, mark well, Mr. Goldsmith, they had never met in the interval. Dolly went to bed early with a headache. Mr. Westwood showed plainly he was disappointed at not finding her in the drawing-room, but from the look on his face when he spoke of her, no one could doubt his feelings. This was at eleven o'clock at night. The next morning I met Dolly coming out of the room. As we stood talking, Mr. Westwood passed on his way downstairs. He gave me a courteous greeting. Dolly he treated as though she had been a

stick or a stone. In ten hours the mischief had been done, and during the whole of them Dolly was in her own room asleep."

"But if the mischief was done then, how could Miss Desmond have been the worker of it?"

"I can't explain it to you. I only feel she did it. Mr. Westwood left us that day. He never saw Dorothy afterwards. He spent a day or two at the Towers, and then went off to Algiers without even saying good-bye. I call it monstrous."

"But I don't see Miss Desmond's connection with it?"

"Because you won't see," said May, irritably. "I tell you she completely took possession of Dolly. The whole family—except Basil and myself—were infatuated with her, and Dolly most of all. Then the change came; the child grew to tremble at her approach. She seemed to watch her face and hang on her words. And yet it was not affection; it wasn't trust; it was just abject fear. No one saw it but me, and I was powerless."

"No, you have done a great deal," said Mr. Goldsmith, soothingly. "You brought her here."

"But what am I to do next?"

"I should say, send for a doctor. Can you trust your own medical man?"

"Perfectly. He is a friend as well as a doctor, and I believe he would keep the matter a profound secret; but—"

"What are your scruples?"

"Of course, he has not seen Miss Desmond—he might laugh at her!"

"I don't think he would do that. Who is he?"

"Dr. Macdonald, of Harley-street."

"I know him. If you liked I would tell him all you have told me, and give him an outline of the case before he saw Miss Courtenay."

"And there is something else. What am I to do if mother takes it into her dear kind head to invite Miss Desmond here?"

"I thought she was in Blankshire?"

"Yes; but I don't know how long she will stay."

"If she were expected here I should suggest your going to the Court. You and your cousin, with Mrs. Parkins, could easily go and prepare for your parents."

May looked at him gratefully.

"Really, you have taken a great weight off my mind."

"Do you authorise me to go to Dr. Macdonald?" asked Mr. Goldsmith.

May hesitated.

"You are sure you could bind him over to secrecy?"

"I am positive. No doctor ever betrays a confidence; besides, Macdonald and I were fellow-students at Heidelberg years ago, and we have kept up the intimacy ever since. Oddly enough, in those days we were fond of dipping into such branches of science as mesmerism and animal magnetism. Macdonald scoffed at both, while I had rather a dread there might be more in them than he thought, so that I think I can promise you that after my talk with him Macdonald will at least give your fears a fair hearing."

May shook hands with him tearfully.

"I don't know how to thank you. Oh! Mr. Goldsmith, I feel as though I stood at the edge of a precipice, and my next step might be fatal."

"You are tired and overstrung," said Adam. "You will feel better after a good night's rest."

May went upstairs to the pretty room where Dorothy had been installed. Mrs. Parkins was one of those women who are born nurses. One meets with them now and again in every class of life.

They may not be up in surgical cases, may not know the latest "treatments," but they can tell by instinct when to speak, when to be silent, and how to talk to their patients without seeming inquisitive.

Mrs. Parkins decided, at one glance that her lady's niece was very ill, and at the second that the illness was more of mind than body. Sleep, rest, amusement, and tender care were the remedies the good woman considered suitable.

She had contrived already to impress Dolly with the idea that her arrival in Park-lane was quite a blessing to the household—that my lady would be ever so much happier to think Lady May had a companion—said that London was just the place (out of the season) for anyone to rest and get strong.

Dolly, who had caught a little of May's feverish anxiety, was soothed into quiet by this admirable tact; and when May came in the little guest was feeling quite at home, more as though she had been sent for and expected than arrived like a little fugitive.

She was lying on the sofa. The fire burned brightly, and Mrs. Parkins was relating a long history of the days when Lady Constance was a child in the Vivian nursery, and, as the old servant expressed it emphatically, "a regular handful."

"I was quite a young woman in those days, Miss Dorothy, but I always told your mamma she'd turn my hair grey with her pranks. Lady May here was just such another. You and Miss Lucy (Mrs. Ernescliffe, I should say) were quite different. When you used to come and stop with us I could see that."

"Lucy is like papa," said Dorothy, "and I am only an odd one. Like no one at all!"

"Not a bit of it, Miss Dorothy. You're the model of your grandmother, poor lady," then, feeling she had touched on a painful subject, Parkins turned to her own young lady, and asked if she didn't think her cousin looked better already?

"I feel better," said Dolly, quietly. "I think I shall sleep to-night."

"Don't you sleep well, Miss Dorothy?" interposed Nurse. "You're over young to have bad nights!"

"I used to sleep like a top," said Dolly, "but lately I suppose I sleep, for I don't remember being awake; only when it is time to get up I feel as if I had never had any real rest, but had been hard at work, and I see things and hear voices. I can't remember anything clearly in the morning, but I know a great deal has happened!"

"You read too many novels, Miss Dorothy, I suspect," said Nurse, kindly. "Anyway, you're sure to sleep to-night; folks always do after a journey."

"And this is such a pretty room!" said Dolly.

Poor little thing! Though a baronet's daughter a very scanty share of "pretty" things had fallen to her lot.

Poverty reigned at Courtenay Hall—not grim, gaunt want, wild stalks with its head aloft, visible to all—but the poverty that needs perpetual pinching to keep it hidden—that entails a constant self-denial; a daily going without of little pleasures, and leaves no margin for the beautiful.

The strict economy of the house had not told on Lucy or her brothers. It made the boys brave and self-reliant, and perhaps Lucy's nature was less sensitive than Dorothy's.

Dolly had winced constantly under the smart of narrow means.

She had none of her sister's pride. She was just a loving, tender-hearted child, and she had loved Cyril Westwood too well to rally from the blow of his coldness. She never spoke his name, but the wound was there.

The room deserved Dorothy's praise. Lady Vivian left all arrangements to the housekeeper; and Parkins, thinking the young ladies would like to be near each other, had shifted Lady May's possessions to one of a suite of four rooms opening on each other, which seemed to her just the thing for the two cousins.

The bedrooms were the two centre rooms—one opening on to a little sanctum, which

would serve as a dressing-room; the other leading to a large, cheerful apartment furnished as a boudoir, and where Dorothy now sat.

Looking through the open door she could see the pretty white chintz-hung bed and dainty scent of polished ash.

"It will be so nice to feel I am near you!" she whispered to May, "in case I feel frightened."

"You won't be frightened, Miss Dorothy," said Nurse, "and if you are you'd better ring for me. Lady May sleeps much too sound to be roused by burglars!"

"Oh! I am not afraid of burglars," said Dolly.

May followed Nurse on to the landing, for she saw the old woman wanted to speak to her. Parkins went straight to the point.

"I wish you'd let me sit in the big chair in your room, Lady May; or else lie on the sofa in the sitting-room. I don't feel easy about Miss Dorothy!"

Lady May shivered.

"Parkins," she said, imploringly. "You don't mean she's very ill? She can't be going to die?"

"To die! Good gracious, no, my lady; but—I don't want to worry the Countess, and I'd rather not have to tell you—but if your ladyship will persist, I don't like her eyes."

"Dolly has beautiful eyes!" said May, simply.

"Indeed she has, my lady, but there's a look in them I can't fathom. It's as though she were looking for something that never came; and then what she said about her nights! She ought not to be alone at night, and yet it might frighten her if I suggested sitting up with her."

"I think it will be best if you sleep on the boudoir sofa," said May, thoughtfully; "then I can call you if—if there is any need; and, Parkins, don't tell mamma. Being here is my cousin's best chance of getting well, and if mother thought her very ill she might feel it right to send her home."

"You needn't fear, my lady. Then you will leave the door of your bedroom unlocked, and if I hear any sound I can come in?"

Lady Vivian paid a visit to the boudoir. Dolly seemed better then, and talked of her sister's honeymoon, and Basil's rejoicing his regiment quite cheerfully. The Countess felt reassured.

"You are only just a little out of sorts, dear," she said, as she gave her a good-night kiss. "Depend upon it, we shall have you quite well in no time."

The invalid was in bed by ten. May watched her for a few moments, but the grey eyes closed almost as soon as her head touched the pillow; and her sleep seemed so sound that May Delaval began to wonder, after all, she had alarmed herself without cause.

But in spite of this she allowed Parkins to keep her vigil in the boudoir, and, by some strange instinct, instead of undressing, she merely took off her heavy trailing gown, and put on a warm, loose-fitting wrapper. Unplaiting her hair, she twisted it round her head; and then, with a strange sense of expectancy, she stretched herself on the bed—and waited.

Lady May's firm intention had been not to go to sleep, but she was young, healthy, and tired. Nature asserted its rights, and she dropped off almost without knowing it. But her sleep was not so sound as usual. About midnight she woke with a start, and sitting up, listened with a strange eagerness for the sound which had disturbed her.

It came again. Her cousin's voice, no mistake about that, and not raised or excited, only made almost unrecognisable by its suppressed pain. May started to her feet just as the door opened, and Mrs. Parkins came in from the boudoir. Evidently the old nurse had expected some alarm, and been prepared. She held in her hand a glass of wine, which she insisted on May's swallowing, then, keeping

very close together, the two went into Dorothy's room.

May Delaval was always self-possessed; but she had to bite her lips to keep back the cry which rose to them. On the ground knelt Dorothy Courtenay, looking almost like some virgin martyr of olden times, in her long white nightdress, her soft hair falling like a veil over her shoulders, her grey eyes full of a passionate entreaty, her little hands clasped feverishly together.

"Have pity!" cried the poor child, her eyes fixed on the large armchair by the fire, as though she saw someone sitting there. "Oh, for Heaven's sake, have pity on me! I did not know what I was doing. Have mercy!"

May felt her blood run cold. She clutched at Parkins' dress for support. Just the mere contact with Nurse's kind, motherly form, seemed to give her fresh courage. Dorothy's eyes turned towards them once or twice, but she never seemed to see them. Her whole mind was riveted on her appeal.

"I did not understand," she moaned. "I did what you told me. How could I tell what it would cause. Oh, give it me back, for pity's sake!"

She paused, and seemed to wait for an answer; then suddenly, as they watched her, her limbs grew rigid. It was as though she had been turned into stone. The outstretched arms were motionless, the head seemed glued into its bent posture, the eyes closed; it was as though all life, all animation, had suddenly been quenched.

Mrs. Parkins waited a minute. She was a strong, muscular woman, with plenty of power in her limbs. With a raised finger, as though to command May's silence, she turned down the bed Dorothy had quitted, as though to prepare for its occupant. Then she took the still form up in her arms, placed it safely in bed, heaped the clothes over, and touching the young lady's arm to ask her to follow, returned to May's room.

May threw herself into a chair, and shook from head to foot as one that has the ague. Mrs. Parkins made up the fire, and then waited until her young lady seemed able to listen to her, before she said,

"Don't look like that, my lady! I shall never forgive myself for letting you see her if it makes you ill!"

May turned towards her eagerly.

"What does it mean?"

"Now, my lady, you need not look so troubled. Poor Miss Dorothy is not mad; nor has she really done anything wrong, poor lamb, though her words would make you think so. It's just a case of sleep-walking—nothing else in the world."

"But—"

"There's no danger," declared Nurse, "unless you wake her suddenly and frighten her. Why, my lady, there's a sight of people walk in their sleep!"

"But why?" persisted May.

"Well, the doctor has to find that out," said Nurse. "The moment Miss Dorothy told me she slept all night, and yet felt dull and tired at waking, I guessed what it was."

May trembled.

"She might kill herself!"

"No, no, my lady; it's not so bad as that. She's ill and troubled, poor dear, young lady! If I may make so bold to say so, Lady May, I'd fancy she has a trouble she can't speak of. It preys upon her mind when she's alone at night, and she fancies it's bigger than it is; but the rest and change 'll work a cure."

May sighed.

"If you had only seen her at her sister's wedding, the brightest, merriest child—and it's not much more than a month ago!"

"You noticed the change at once?"

"Yes; very gradually."

"My lady, just think if you'd had no proper rest since Mrs. Ernescliff's wedding, if every night instead of sleeping quietly you'd been acting a play, as it were, that you believed real—don't you think you'd be wan and pale?"

Depend upon it, Lady May, now we've found out what ails her. Miss Dorothy will soon pick up her strength."

"Oughtn't we to go back," suggested May, "and look at her?"

Nurse decided to go alone. She told May two people must make more noise than one, and so the danger of arousing her cousin would be increased.

She was thankful, when she saw poor Dorothy, that the young lady was spared the sight.

The child was kneeling up in bed, repeating the piteous entreaties, and this time her voice had such an agonised ring that Parkins almost determined, at all risks, to rouse her. But fear of the shock to her nervous system prevailed, and so the old nurse crept back to Lady May, and persuaded her to go to bed, assuring her she could be of no use to her cousin.

"I know the Countess means to send for the doctor early in the morning, my lady, and if you don't get some rest you won't be fit to sit with Miss Dorothy and amuse her," persuaded the old servant. "I shall be wiser hearing; and indeed, poor lamb, it's little any of us can do for her!"

Thus adjured, May went to bed, her last thought a wild hope that Adam Goldsmith had been as good as his word, and really seen Dr. Macdonald.

She need not have feared. Where she was concerned, he thought nothing of pains or trouble.

Late as it was when he left Park-lane, he drove at once to Harley-street, where his intimacy with the physician was such an established fact that, though past nine, he was shown at once into the library, where his friend was enjoying at the same time coffee and a new scientific work.

"Ha, Goldsmith! what good wind blows you here? My wife and the children are at Hastings with my mother, and I am a lone, lorn bachelor for the time being."

"I have come on business," said Adam, with a slight uneasiness in his tone; "and—I will confess it—to ask a great favour at your hands."

Dr. Macdonald smiled.

"My dear fellow, if you've come professionally, I don't think you need be anxious. You possessed a splendid constitution as a young man, and your quiet, regular life must have kept it in its original soundness. I should say you might be accepted by the most scrupulous life assurance, only, being a Cæsar, you don't require to take out a policy."

"It is not about myself. Macdonald, I believe I am doing a very eccentric thing. If I offend the etiquette of your profession, you must forgive me."

"I don't think we are likely to quarrel," said the doctor, smiling; "and, of course, whatever you tell me is a secret from the world. Now, what is it?"

"Do you remember at Heidelberg our researches into mesmerism and such phenomena?"

"Perfectly," but Adam Goldsmith noticed his expression changed, as though he did not like the question.

"You scoffed at it, and I was a trifle bitter," he continued.

"Before you say any more," interrupted Macdonald, "I had better tell you that my views are changed. I believe great cures are sometimes wrought by mesmerism and its kindred sciences; but I believe the risk of meddling with such mysteries so great that I would never consent to extrust one dear to me to such experiments!"

Goldsmith nodded.

"I'm glad to hear it. Now I'm going to encroach on medical etiquette. I am here at the request of one of your patients, Lady May Delaval."

"She is not a patient. She never ailed anything in her life, and unless she dies by accident or violence will probably live till she's ninety!" said Dr. Macdonald, with a comical

look at his friend, as though he thought the opinion must be very agreeable to him. "She's a suitable girl, too, though she is an heiress. Surely you are not going to tell me she's bitten with mesmerism?"

In a very few words Adam Goldsmith explained the case, only keeping back Cyril Westwood's part in it, and the name of the lady May Delaval considered her cousin's destroyer. Dr. Macdonald listened with intense interest.

"I always thought her a sensible girl," he said, when Adam had finished; "and she's right in saying it would never do to tell her mother. The Countess is a charming woman, but she has a feminine horror of things she can't understand; and if her unfortunate niece is really under their mysterious influence, would be inclined, I fancy, to send her home at once. If your favour simply consists in my holding my tongue to Lord and Lady Vivian, I think I can grant it. I don't suppose they will ask me if their niece's disorder is caused by mesmeric spells, and so long as they don't I can keep silent."

"And you think that is the case?"

"I could not possibly give an opinion without seeing Miss Courtenay. I agree with Lady May so far as to believe that such things have been."

"Then people possessing such demonical powers should be killed!"

"Nonsense!" said the doctor, sharply. "You would have to commit wholesale murders. Mesmerism has quite a host of ardent supporters, and would be harmless enough if exercised only in public interests. I know two women who make a handsome fortune by their 'cures.' I believe fully that if the people who go to them consulted a medical man and followed his advice, they would derive equal benefit; but you see the process would be less interesting. The ladies are of high birth and great fascinations. They are rarely to be consulted more than five months in the year, and their patients pay heavy fees. I know, in some cases of insomnia and hysteria the result of their treatment has been really marvellous; but then I consider them specialists, and at the head of their class."

"You mean they have studied deeply?"

"I don't believe they have studied at all. They come of a family in which mesmeric gifts are almost an inheritance. In every generation for centuries, the elder told me, at least one of their women has possessed the power. In days gone by she candidly admits it was rather a dangerous attribute, being called in homely language witchcraft, or having an 'evil eye.'"

"And you think these two ladies really do good?"

Dr. Macdonald did not answer the question.

"I think they are making a fortune in a very harmless fashion. If people like to go to them, and pay large sums, I see no harm in their profiting by the folly. I believe, myself, common-sense, regular exercise, and a moderate amount of perseverance would do more than all their 'passes'; but it's a free country, and if people like to fancy themselves cured by a few tricks of legerdemain, I see no harm in it."

"And you know these ladies, and like them?"

"I know them slightly. Honestly speaking, I do not like them. When in their company I am often given to thinking it would fare ill with anyone who offended them."

"I don't quite understand!"

"They are adepts in their art. They possess a skill as mesmerisers I have never seen equalled. If ever they had an enemy, don't you see what a terrible weapon they would have at command!"

"You are almost repeating Lady May Delaval's words. Her theory is that her cousin's state of health is produced by mesmerism exercised by someone who has an object in injuring her."

"Very plausible; but who is the someone?"

"I am not at liberty to say!"
Dr. Macdonald raised his eyebrows.
"Then there is someone. It is not merely a dream of Lady May's about some visionary person!"

"No; there is someone."

"A woman!"

"A young lady to whom Lady May Delaval has an unconquerable aversion. This much is certain. From the day of this person's intimacy with Miss Courtenay she began to fade."

"If you believe all this, Goldsmith, you are keeping something back. The mysterious 'young lady' must have an object?"

"Lady May says she wanted to estrange Miss Courtenay from her lover!"

"Oh, there was a lover! That complicates things. Pray what does he say to his fiancée's state?"

"She is not his fiancée. He went away suddenly without proposing!"

"Ah!"

"You may look cynical, but there is no doubt he was deeply attached to Miss Courtenay."

"Well, Goldsmith, you evidently are of Lady May Delaval's opinion. Of course, I can't pledge myself to it yet. I must see Miss Courtenay, and gain some knowledge of her supposed mesmerism."

"You think such a thing could be?"

"I don't think many women can have such power. I know either of the two ladies I spoke of just now could effect all you have told me of; but theirs is quite an exceptional case. Indeed, I did hear that the younger had found her health utterly broken down by the continued strain, and that her relative had had to procure a new assistant, who did not succeed so completely."

"And you will not speak to the Countess of our impressions?"

"Certainly not."

"Lady May is very much attached to her cousin."

"And you are very much attached to Lady May. Really, Goldsmith, you puzzle me. The whole family are fond of you. It's clear to anyone with average perception, you have only to ask for the daughter to win her. You are fathoms deep in love with her, and yet you keep silent!"

"She is an heiress."

"Well, you have money enough to save you from any chance of being thought mercenary. Besides, it so happens there is no entail, and if Lady May vexed her father he could cut her off with a shilling, though, of course, she would always keep the fortune her godfather left her."

"I always understood the estates were strictly entailed; I am sure I have been told so."

"They used to be. The present Earl joined with his father to cut off the entail. I don't suppose a dozen people know the fact, but Lord Vivian can do whatever he pleases with his property. If his daughter vexed him he could make that nice young nephew of his heir. So really, if Vivian Court is the drawback to your felicity, you might speak out at once."

Adam Goldsmith shook his head.

"I shall never marry!"

"Well, you know your own business best, but I think you are a foolish fellow."

After Adam Goldsmith's visit it was no surprise to Dr. Macdonald to receive a few lines from Lady Vivian, asking him to call that morning to see her niece, Miss Courtenay, who was out of health. The Earl's gout was better, and no longer needed a daily visit, or the Countess would not have needed to write.

It flashed on the doctor as he read her note she must be really anxious, or she would have waited until he paid this visit to her husband the following day.

Knowing the habits of the family well, Dr. Macdonald arrived at Park-lane at the exact time when he knew the Countess would be

answering the voluminous letters for which her husband often talked of engaging a private secretary.

The Earl always dictated his replies to his wife, and was so impatient of interruption that it was pretty certain the doctor would see his new patient before Lady Vivian would escape from her attendance on his old one.

Lady May came to meet the doctor, and took him upstairs.

"I persuaded Dorothy to have her breakfast in my boudoir; she looks so tired and ill. Did Mr. Goldsmith call on you last night, Dr. Macdonald?"

"He did."

"And he told you my fears?"

"Yes, and I replied, your ladyship's theory is possible, but not probable. I trust you do not condemn me as hopelessly commonplace?"

"No; but more has happened since." Parkins, my old nurse, will explain to you."

Parkins met them at the door of the boudoir, and had a little talk with the doctor on her own account; then he was at last ushered into his patient's presence. Used as he was to sad sights, the physician felt a thrill of pity. Dorothy Courtenay was so beautiful and so child-like; innocence and purity were stamped on her brow; she looked made for happiness—to be the sunshine of a good man's home—and yet one glance told the experienced, practised eye of the doctor that some subtle mischief was at work.

Dorothy answered his questions freely. She did not complain of any pain, she was only very tired and very weak; she did not think she wanted to get better, only just to rest, not to feel so tired, so dull and heavy. Yes, she was glad she had come to London; she liked to be with May.

"You are fond of your cousin?" said Dr. Macdonald, gently. "You know she would not harm you. Now tell me—is there anyone you are afraid of?"

A great change swept over the fair, wasted face. Dolly trembled as though smitten with a sudden fear, and her answers, which had been so frank and ready, stopped. She just looked into the doctor's face, with the tears stealing down her cheeks.

"Poor little thing!" he said, gently. "Do you know, Miss Courtenay, I think your cousin is your best doctor. Don't you feel better when she is with you?"

"Yes." And then she added, in a whisper, "May is quite safe; it can't hurt her."

It was no use to ask the child what she meant, all she conveyed, by that mysterious "it," Deeply moved, Doctor Macdonald said kindly,—

"I will write you a prescription, but what you need is rest. Lady May will keep you amused, and see that you don't tire yourself; and Mrs. Parkins, who is my favourite nurse, will feed you with all kinds of nourishing delicacies. But there is one thing we cannot help you in unless you let us. Is there anything on your mind? It seems to me some fear troubles you. Now, Miss Courtenay, you may be frightening yourself for the merest fancy. I don't ask you to confide in me, a perfect stranger, but surely you might unburden your heart to your cousin? Whatever is on your mind, tell her. I don't think you can have done anything wrong, my poor child! You are most likely worrying yourself over a chimera; but whatever it is, tell your cousin. I have known her from a child, and I can promise you will not find her harsh or unsympathising."

The girl turned to May with a look of passionate love; her lips moved as though about to speak. Then a convulsive shudder passed over her frame, as though disturbed by some invisible power, and with a smothered sob she cried,—

"I dare not! Oh! I dare not! She would be so angry!"

(To be continued next week.)

This story commenced in No. 2,065. Back numbers can be obtained through all Newsagents.

She Had to Crawl Upstairs!

A WOMAN'S SUFFERING FROM RHEUMATISM

BILE BEANS COMPLETELY CURE HER INDIGESTION AND LIVER COMPLAINT ALSO ENDED

For the woman in the home—who, although often aching, has to toil from morn till night, cooking, cleaning, washing—the following story, told by Mrs. Eliza Beale, a laundress of Knighton Cottage, Avenue Road, Atwood Bank, near Redditch, should have exceptional interest. This is what she said to a "Redditch Indicator" reporter:—

"Some seven or eight years ago I was attacked with rheumatism in the legs. This, as you may easily imagine, was a great trial to me, for besides hindering me in my work, it caused me a good deal of pain, and prevented me getting about as easily as I had hitherto been able to do. On several occasions when out on an errand I experienced great difficulty in reaching home, and often I was unable to go upstairs, except by crawling on my hands and knees."

"In addition to this I began to be troubled with indigestion and liver complaint. The pain caused by indigestion was at times most acute, and completely prostrated me."

"I was compelled to obtain medical advice, but the doctor's medicine only afforded temporary relief. I continued in this way for a long time, sometimes better, sometimes worse; but never really well. I also tried several liniments and preparations for rheumatism, but it was all money spent in vain. Some time ago I happened to read in the paper of a case similar to my own which had been cured by Chas. Forde's Bile Beans, and I determined to give them a trial."

"My son obtained a box for me, and when I had taken a few of the Beans I began to feel better. The rheumatism was not so painful, and I did not suffer so much from indigestion. I continued with the Beans, and gradually both the indigestion and rheumatism completely disappeared. I can now walk almost anywhere, and I do not feel like the same person. I am extremely thankful for the benefit I have derived from Bile Beans, and shall not fail to recommend them to others who suffer either from rheumatism or indigestion."

It is interesting to note also the effect which Bile Beans had upon Mrs. Beale's son, who had been a great sufferer from indigestion and loss of appetite. In answer to the queries of the reporter, he said:—"I commenced taking Bile Beans for indigestion and loss of appetite, from which I suffered, and they acted like a charm. They have quite restored my appetite, and I can now eat any kind of food without feeling any ill effect afterwards."

Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness which accomplished the above cures are purely vegetable in composition, and their excellence has been so well proved that many eminent doctors are now prescribing them largely. They are a certain cure for rheumatism, indigestion, congestion of the liver, loss of appetite, constipation, piles, anaemia, colds, chill, headache, neuralgia, dizziness, biliousness, flatulence, pains in the chest, loins or back, female irregularities, and are unequalled as a preventative of influenza.

Obtainable from all chemists or post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Company, Red Cross Street, London, E.C., upon receipt of prices, 1s. 1½d. or 2s. 9d. per box (2s. 9d. box contains three times 1s. 1½d. size). Bile Beans are sold only in sealed boxes, never loose.

ANOTHER FORM.—"That goes without saying," said Miss Blecker, in the course of a conversation. "Yes," replied Miss Backbay, of Boston; "it perambulates without articulation."

A DESPERATE DEED

(Continued from page 371).

Now he was not smiling. Now he lay hopeless and still, while in from off the fields that soft, delicious breeze "came blowing and blowing."

So long—how long he did not know. But it seemed an hour from the time the Earl had left till the moment when he woke from his dream. A mocking and a tender dream! All of a girl with a pure, proud face, and rosy, sweet lips and sunlit hair—all about the clearness of her presence, the comfort and the joy.

A cruel dream!

Did he hear the rustle of a woman's gown? Did he catch a faint scent of violets?

He roused himself. Had someone really entered? He turned his head. With one bound he was on his feet. It was—it was she!

Just across the little room there, the flickering candle-light revealing her, slender and dark-clad, she stood.

"Lady Iva!"

He barely whispered the name.

She lifted her gloved hand, pushed her veil up over her little round hat. In the dingy prison-cell, "star-sweet on a gloom profound," again he saw her face!

How sharp the battle she had fought with pride before she came here to-night, he would never know.

She had recalled every circumstance against him. She remembered his very question, asked the morning after the discovery of the murder:

"Supposing someone you knew, someone you cared for, was suspected of having killed him, what would you think?"

All this, and more.

But he loved her. His life was in danger. And so, nerved by that divine self-sacrifice, that passionate self-surrender of which only great hearts are capable, she had come.

By love was she victoriously defeated.

The prisoner did not move, but he looked at her as those long blind may at their dearest when at length they see.

She was very pale. Ah, his quick eye noted all change! Like one of her own snow-drops, so timidly blooming now, was that fair cheek of hers.

There were traces of tears upon it, too. More lustrous for their late dew, those brave and beautiful eyes.

She tried to speak. No words came.

He placed her a chair.

"Sit down," gently; "you are tired."

She remained standing.

All his being was filled with the gladness of her presence, vibrant with exultation. But even if "his lips were close to her golden head," he would not move until he knew her will.

"I came to tell you—to tell you before to-morrow—"

The thrilling, tender, proud, pathetic voice. He stepped on toward it, still with outstretched arms, as if to quench upon his breast that voice.

She ceased. Her lips would quiver so!

A sudden bitter thought dawned upon him.

"To tell me you forgive me, or pity me?"

It was said!

She started as if struck. Over that shy, courageous, blush-rose face of hers a carmine glow came weeping.

"Neither."

Very low, but he heard.

He came nearer.

"What, then?"

He was merciless.

"This, Lionel—only—that I love you!"

CHAPTER XL.

What evidence?

That was the query which maddened my lord as he rode furiously home through the clear, blue April gloaming.

Was it of any importance, or had they magnified some trivial clue? How in the name

of Heaven had they come to fasten suspicion on her?

One thing was certain—Lilian must not be allowed to attend the trial to-morrow. Heaven only knew what might transpire, come to light.

He turned in at his gates. A broad-backed woman in a black shawl was passing out. She ducked him a respectful courtesy.

He nodded carelessly.

Mrs. Brown? No. He remembered now—the person who had startled him so in the corridor a couple of weeks ago—Mrs. Martin Simpson.

He had not given her unpleasant recognition a thought since.

Lilian had allowed her sister to wear the locket he had given her. That was hardly in the best taste. But bah! why stop to count straws now when a life hung in the balance?

Home!

He leaped off; a groom led Molly Bawn away. He ascended the steps, passed along the wide stone balcony, sweeping around the library windows.

At one he paused—a long, French window—the crystal doors of which stood ajar.

Softly in the night breeze the curtains fluttered.

Within, the high-pedestaled lamps at either side of the mantel burned mellowly under their jewelled shades; and directly below one, swaying softly back and forth in a pretty, low rocking chair of bentwood and plush, my lady.

My lady, with her fair, idle hands clasped behind her dark, cropped head, and a far-away, almost ethereal, look on that little, child-like face of hers.

She did not look like a murderess, the Earl thought, with a sudden throb of compassion. Poor little creature!

But he crushed down the kindly impulse, went in.

She looked up at him. There was no kiss of meeting, no fond word as of old. Strangers

would have shown more cordiality than he and she.

When others were present,

"Nothing was to see. But calm and concord. Where a speech was due, there came the speech; when smiles were wanted, too, smiles were as ready."

But alone! Then it was different.

"I have been with Lionel," he began, abruptly.

She slightly inclined her head.

"And I wish to say to you now that I do not consider it proper you should attend the trial to-morrow."

Stiffly put, but he felt ill at ease.

"I am sorry"—very quietly—"to differ from you. I am going."

She had not changed her attitude, just spoken with that unemotional decision.

"You must not, you are far too weak yet. The crush, the excitement—you could not stand them."

He was positively pleading with her.

"I am going!" just as gently as before.

How stubborn she was!

His lordship flushed angrily. To what was she not bent on exposing herself—to what odium, what direct indignity?

"You shall not!"

There was temper enough in his speech.

Her chair kept up its even rocking.

"I shall!"

The Earl clenched his hands.

He was defied.

"Do you know," standing, actually towering over her, with crimson brow and heaving breast, "do you know what they are saying?"

He was terribly in earnest.

She ceased rocking.

"What?" breathlessly.

Did she surmise? her calm was broken.

"That you," grinding out the words between his tight shut teeth, "that you murdered Sir Geoffrey Damyn!"

"I!"

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She leaped to her feet. She poised quivering before him.

"I!" she repeated.

Loudly in the silence ticked the clock on the mantel.

There was no mistaking that face, that cry of horror.

"There is peace so calm and bitter that one almost longs for strife." Such a peace fell upon them now.

He turned from her.

She stood quite still—and thought.

She would go to-morrow as she had intended. She would tell them how she had stolen out on Christmas night—with what purpose. Tell, too, how Damyn was shot dead before Lionel came in sight.

A sickening silence.

My lord could bear it no longer.

He wheeled around.

"Well," huskily, "what have you to say?"

My lady answered,

"Nothing!"

CHAPTER XLI.

A famous trial indeed!

For a couple of days the incoming trains had disgorged curious crowds at Rothlyn Station. The village was full to overflowing.

The court, which was the principal one of the new assize courts, was literally packed—but packed with no common assemblage.

The crime was presumably committed by an aristocrat. The murdered man had been a baronet, his host one of the peers of England. So men of their own order flocked down to this hitherto quiet town, and formed solid and distinguished phalanxes in the court where the trial was in progress.

There, to be sure, were nearly all the guests who had spent Christmas at the Castle; there, too, the Earl and Countess of Silverdale and Lady Ivy Romaine.

Every inch of standing room was taken—dead silence reigned—when the court opened and the prisoner was brought in and placed in the dock.

Then a faint murmur rippled around the *bar*.

He did not seem anxious, nor yet indifferent.

Tall, dashing, handsome, he looked straight down on the upturned faces below, as he took his seat in the dock.

There was no sadness, no weariness in that look now. The high-born young face was serene as the sunny April day. A tender, half-repressed delight lit to a new, a softer beauty those unflinching and dauntless eyes.

He bowed to those who sent him dumb greeting—but absently.

Where was she?

Ah, he saw her; There, sitting next her father, who, bolt upright, with grim brows and folded arms, looked straight ahead. There his loyal love—his true sweetheart!

Dressed all in silvery grey, a small velvet bonnet framing in most charmingly the soft, loose curls; a knot of violets at her breast; a drift of peachy bloom in her cheeks; a vagrant smile tremulous on her lips.

Their glances met.

He bowed reverently.

Could that be the Countess? How she had changed!

Every vestige of her youth, her beauty, seemed to have fled.

Was remorse the cause? he marvelled, vaguely; or her severe illness?

Then he faced the judge. The counsel for the crown had opened the case.

Quite a formidable array appeared the facts presented.

All the evidence obtained at the inquest was reviewed. The hesitation and confusion of the accused when asked by the Earl if the case was one of suicide; the well-known animosity existing between the young men; the cat's-eye caught in the clothes of deceased; the few hairs which had been proven in true and texture to match the prisoner's; the threat of Christmas Eve. A handkerchief, too, had been procured from a servant of the accused; a handkerchief—here the learned gentleman lowered his voice mysteriously—on which blood-stained fingers had been wiped. The court would prove it had been discarded in his room, at the Towers, the day after Christmas.

This, a witness proved.

Indeed, the Crown brought forward quite an array of witnesses.

Even the Earl was obliged to go into the box. He had passed a sleepless night—a night of misery. He was wholly unfitted for the ordeal.

Grimly and briefly he responded to the questions asked.

He had heard the threat? Yes. Was not Sir Geoffrey a suitor for his daughter's hand? Yes. The deceased had mentioned the hour he would return from Rothlyn? Yes. Had the prisoner about that hour left his house? Yes.

That was all.

His lordship stepped down.

Another man took his place.

Laborious were the efforts of the prosecution.

The court rose for luncheon.

Resuming, the thread was taken up where dropped.

It was almost three o'clock before the case for the Crown ended, and the defence was begun.

The chief counsel for the prisoner was one of the most distinguished advocates of the criminal bar, and his junior also had already made a name in the profession. The opening was calm, but confident. Mr. Melrose, K.C., commenced by dilating upon the terrible nature of the crime, and then reminded the jury that they had heard the prisoner plead "Not Guilty." His learned friend and him-

self, he said, would endeavour to sustain and establish that plea.

The crowd settled itself eagerly to listen, perhaps the trio from the Castle the most absorbed of them all.

Since the commencement of the proceedings they had not risen.

Friends had pressed around at the recess, urging them to go out to luncheon.

But they had declined. They were too anxious about the result; they could not eat.

But the Marquis, who still lingered in Sussex, slipped away and came back with claret and sandwiches.

They really must have some refreshments! So, to please him, and in gratitude, they pretended to eat and drink.

A very silent party. Duskily robed, marble still and marble pale, my lady sat. The Earl was nervous, as he never had been before in all his varied, travelled life.

And Lady Ivy? She had not the intense and guilty dread of the others to crush her. But she loved him. And she was most deeply, most thrillingly, anxious.

Outside was a delightful day, blue-skied, and sunny, with the scent of all the Rothlyn gardens burdening the frolicking April breeze; inside that dense concourse sat in the stillness of intense interest.

"We have considered," concluded the eloquent leader for the defendant—"we have been impressed with the conviction that the silence of our client, which has been so severely commented upon, was but an honourable reserve on his part, assumed for the purpose of shielding the real criminal. How far our surmises were correct will be proved by our first witness. Call Rick Pollen!"

"Call Rick Pollen!"

(To be concluded next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 2061. Back numbers can be obtained through all News-agents.)

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Combines with the properties of an ordinary Ointment, the powerful antiseptic and healing virtues of Carbolic Acid.

A valuable remedy for Burns, Bruises, Cuts, Scalds, Earache, Throat Colds, Piles and Skin Ailments generally.

It allays irritation and stimulates a healthy action of the skin.

13½d. per pot, at Chemists, Grocers, Stores, &c.

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Facetiæ

"Mr son, define 'ambition.'" "Well, it's always feeling that you want to do something that you know you can't."

"The shades of nights are falling fast," sang Mr. Mitts, as he went to pull down the blind and jerked it off the roller.

HE: "What a beautiful figure Miss Sweetly has!" SHE: "Yes, the dressmaker says it is so easy to build upon—so angular, you know!"

A YOUNG man was asked why he did not dance the round dances. He replied: "I prefer to do my hugging on the sofa; it is not so tiresome."

A PAPER devoted to the best interests of single blessedness suggests a tax on beauty. There is scarcely a woman who would not demand to pay the tax.

MARIE: "Why is Mr. Puffer in such a hurry to marry Maud?" ARTHUR: "He promised her that he wouldn't smoke a cigar while they were engaged."

CHANGE of ownership: "Are you the owner of this house, Jones?" "I was, before the baby was born. I am under the impression the nurse owns it now."

FIGGS: "You have an independent income, haven't you?" DIGGS: "Independent? Well, I should say I had. It has utterly ignored me for years."

GIVE a young man plenty of money, wine, and fast horses; and Satan has no anxiety about that man; he ceases to watch him, and only gives directions for his reception.

THERE are women who sometimes think on Sunday that they have religion, but when the clothes line breaks down on Monday they find out that they haven't.

"WHERE are you going, my pretty maid?" "Going to cooking school, sir," she said. "Can I go with you, my pretty maid?" "We don't cook veal to-day," she said.

A RECENT advertisement reads: "Wanted, a man and his wife as caretakers for a gentleman's country house. One must be sober." Was it too much to expect both to be?

"MAMMA," said a young lady just home from school, gazing upon Alexander Harrison's "Open Sea," "is that an oil painting or a water-colour?" "Sh!" answered her mother, with a look of surprise and chagrin; "it's a water-colour. Don't you see the water?"

IT is said that a scientific explanation has been given to account for dreams that occasionally come true, but nobody has been able to make out why it is that a mosquito will leave fresh meat any time to lunch on a man as old as a proverb and tougher than a cowboy.

"BREAKFAST with Shakespeare!" announced an æsthetic waiter at a high-toned boarding-house. "Goodness, man, do you serve up Shakespeare with breakfast?" inquired the frightened boarder. "Perhaps you prefer Bacon?" suggested the waiter, with ineffable scorn.

A SOCIETY of ladies wishing to have an ill-natured person restrained from meddling with their affairs, consulted a lawyer. After hearing their statement, the lawyer said: "Well, ladies, what do you say to a mandamus?" "A mandamus!" exclaimed the spokeswoman. "Why, it would be just awful to have a man do such a thing!"

A YOUNG tenor singer obtained a hearing before the manager of a country theatre. He sang, but the manager stopped him at the end of three or four notes, and said: "Very well; leave me your address, and I will think of you if it should happen." "What do you mean by 'if it should happen'?" interrupted the young tenor. "Why, if my theatre should burn—" "Well, what then?" "I should then engage you to cry 'Fire!'"

ADAM was the first odd fellow, but when he took Eve into partnership he ceased to be of the independent order.

WITH some people it is not their own troubles so much as the happiness of their neighbours that disturbs them.

NOTHING but perpetual going to sea in every variety of craft will effectually get rid of sea-sickness, unless one is disposed to try that finest of all remedies—stopping ashore.

YOUNG MOTHER: "Wake up! Quick! Quick! You must run for the doctor." YOUNG FATHER: "Eh? What's the matter?" YOUNG MOTHER: "Baby has stopped smiling in her sleep."

JUDGE (to prisoner after conviction): "Anything to say, Sneaky?" "Yes, my lord, I 'ave to say as I am the victim of my physician's advice. He says, says he, 'you wants change,' and I took it."

"AM I as dear to you as ever, George?" asked the wife, caressingly. "My love," answered George, candidly, "since you took to tailor-made clothes, you grow dearer and dearer every day."

"BROWNSON has cured his wife of everlasting talking." "How, for goodness sake?" "He told her that she looked prettier with her mouth closed, and now she can hardly be induced to utter a syllable."

MR. JAGGS: "I tell you, whisky is a handy thing to have around when you have cramps." MRS. JAGGS (who knows a thing or two): "Yes, and cramps are a handy thing to have around when you have whisky in the house."

A STRANGER in a West of England town claimed to be an antiquary, whereupon old Josh Bugby, who was the village oracle, said: "An antiquary, is he? Well, I'm blamed if he looks as though he knew one kind of an ant from another!"

SAID a sharp attorney to a rambling witness: "Now you must give explicit and exact answers. You said you drove a milk-waggon, did you not?" "No, sir, I didn't." "Don't you drive a milk-waggon?" "No, sir." "Aha! What do you do, sir?" "I drive a hoos, sir."

"PENELOPE," said her brother, "don't look angry, now. But, really, didn't Will kiss you when he left last night?" "How can you use such plebeian phraseology, George?" she answered, haughtily. "There was a slight labial juxtaposition, but it was only momentary, and hence not innocuous."

AUGUSTUS (gracefully resting on his left knee): "Oh, Angelina! such love as mine ne'er beat in mortal bosom! I would die for you. I'd—" ANGELINA (interrupting him and speaking with solemn emphasis): "Hold on! I don't want that kind of a man—a fellow who'd sneak out of the world and leave me all the bother of his funeral."

A MIXED TOAST.—At a recent dinner given by the chief magistrate of London, three foreign consuls were present whom the Lord Mayor wished to honour by drinking their healths. He accordingly, it is alleged, but we do not vouch for its strict accuracy, directed the toastmaster to announce the healths of "the three present consuls." He, however, mistaking the words, gave out the following: "The Lord Mayor drinks the health of the three per cent. consuls."

WORKING ON A CHILD'S FEELINGS.—"My darling," said a fond mother, who believed in appealing to children's tender feelings instead of punishing them, "if you are so naughty you will grieve mamma so that she will get ill and have to lie in a bed in a dark room and take nasty medicine; and then she may die and have to be taken away out to the cemetery and be buried; and you will—" The child had become more solemn, but an angelic smile overspread his face at his mother's last words, and, throwing his arms about her neck, he exclaimed, "Oh, mamma! and mayn't I sit beside the coachman?"

ITEM from a San Francisco paper: "Mr. Jones felodeseed this morning successfully. He hymenated three years ago, and he will be sepulchred to-morrow." Who says that they cannot write English out on the Pacific Coast?

SALVATION ARMY CAPTAIN: "I hope you will be fired with zeal in our cause." RECRUIT: "I dunno 'zactly wot dat is, but if its anything like bein' 'fired' down the front steps, like I was las' night, I don't believe I'm goin' to like it much."

"So you passed yourself as a widow while you were away, eh?" said Mr. Briggs to his spouse, who, by the way, is rather good-looking. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, but I suppose you are not." "Of course I am not," was her reply. "I did so merely on Johnny's account. You have no idea how kind all the gentlemen were to him."

A MEMBER of one of the rhetorical classes in a certain college had just finished his declamation, when one of the class said, "Mr. —, do you suppose that a general would address his soldiers in the manner in which you spoke that piece?" "Yes, sir, I do," was the reply, "if he was half scared to death."

MISS LAYMELOW: "Really, Mr. Squirmley, I do not think that you had better take me out. You don't know what a perfect Jonah I am, and always will be." MR. SQUIRMLEY (seizing a long-awaited chance): "Oh, Miss LaymeLOW—let me be the whale!" MISS LAYMELOW: "This is very sudden, Mr. Squirmley. But I have no desire for a three days' engagement."

THE ADVANTAGES OF TRAVEL.—"I should infer, sir," he said to a young man, "from the air of hauteur and easy self-possession which seem to be your distinguishing characteristics, that you have mixed much with the world, and have travelled extensively?" "Yes, sir," replied the young man, graciously unbending, "I have been an extensive traveller in my time. For the past eight years I've been an engine-driver on the underground railway."

Gems

BOYS, trying to obtain happiness, simply to have it, is nothing more than selfishness.

A JOYOUS smile adds an hour to one's life—a heartfelt laugh, a day, a grin, not a moment.

If you would not have a person deceive you, be careful not to let him know you mistrust him.

THE best portion of a good man's life is his little nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love.

THERE are men who have hardly tasted liquor—cold, passionless, and yet they would stuff a ballot-box or swindle a widow.

You must try to be good and amiable to everybody, and do not think that Christianity consists in a melancholy and morose life.

REAL difficulties are the best cure of imaginary ones; because God helps us in the real ones and so makes us ashamed of the other.

THOUGH the Word and the Spirit do the main work, yet suffering so nobles the door of the heart that both the Word and the Spirit have easier entrance.

LET your religion make you more considerate, more loving and attractive, more able to think of and enter into the pleasures and interests of others.

You must make, at least once every week, a special act of love to God's will above all else, and that not only in things supportable, but also in things insupportable.

THE greatest forces work quietly. The young person who is going to amount to the most a generation hence is not the one who is making the most fuss about it now.

Gleanings

BEATS AWT.—Shoe machinery.

OBITUARY NOTES.—The music of the Dead Sea.

The cats in a restaurant window are the tramps' food for reflection.

MOTOR CAR LANGUAGE.—Since the advent of the motor car, the English language has been enriched by a number of new words. In England, the word "automobilism," signifying the pastime or business of motor-car driving, appears to have come to stay. Various manufacturers of motor-car specialties allude to their goods as "motorities," "motoralities," and "motor-cessories," while two tradesmen have named their factories and shops "Automobilia" and "Motoria," respectively.

THE LOUIS STYLES.—It was the French king, Louis XI. who invented gold lace, and it was Lou's XIV. who ordered all the silk upholsteries of the palace done in white with figures of gold and blue and a touch of red. The louisian silks are named after him, and all the French kings of the name of Louis have had their names brought down to posterity through the invention of some article of dress, whether it be a Louis Quinze heel or a Louis Seize coat, while to Louis Quatorze belongs the honour of a cuff and a hat.

HOW SEA BIRDS QUENCH THEIR THIRST.—The means by which sea-birds quench their thirst when far out at sea is described by an old skipper, who told how he has seen birds at sea, far from any land that could furnish them water, hovering around and under a storm-cloud, clattering like ducks on a hot day at a pond, and drinking in the drops of rain as they fell. They will smell a rain squall a hundred miles distant, or even further off, and scud for it with almost inconceivable swiftness. How long sea birds can exist without water is only a matter of conjecture, but probably their powers of enduring thirst are increased by habit, and possibly they go without water for many days, if not for several weeks.

WHERE LAUNDRIES ARE UNKNOWN.—"It's the oddest thing to me," said an old sea captain, who for many years was on the China trade, as he settled himself comfortably back in his chair and blew a few rings of smoke into the air, "that nine out of every ten Chinamen who go to America open laundries and engage in business which does not exist in their native land. As everyone knows, the Chinese at home wear soft cotton and woollen garments, according to the season, and there is not a pound of starch in all China. Stiffly starched clothes are unknown, and the Chinese men do not do the washing as they do in this country. Neither is there any regular laundry in the flowery kingdom. Therefore it is more than passing strange that Chinamen should all go to America and engage in a trade so foreign to their home industries."

CURIOUS USES FOR FANS.—Various are the uses for fans in Japan. Properly manipulated, they many times take the place of speech. The umpire at wrestling and fencing matches uses a heavy fan shaped like a huge butterfly, the handle being the body and rendered imposing by cords of silk. The various motions of the fan constitute a language which the wrestlers fully understand and appreciate. Formerly, in time of war the Japanese commander used a large fan, having a frame of iron covered with thick paper. In case of danger it could be shut, and a blow from its iron bones was no light affair. One notable variety of fan is made of waterproof paper, which can be dipped in water and creates great coolness by evaporation without wetting the clothes. The flat fan made of rough paper is often used as a grain winnow, to blow the charcoal fires, and as a dustpan. The Japanese gentleman of the old school, who never wears a hat, uses his fan to shield his eyes from the sun. His head, bare from childhood, hardly needs shade, and when it does he spreads an umbrella, and with his fan, he directs his servants and saves talking.

Time is not always money to him who trusts.

A ROUGH ESTIMATE.—Guessing at the number engaged in a street brawl.

WHY THE EXPRESS WAS DELAYED.—A Fife-shire paper tells the following amusing story: "For unseemly rapidity of locomotion, our Scottish railway trains have an infamous and dangerous reputation. It is probable that the North British Railway, somewhere in its strolls through Fife, is the hero of the following depressing yarn: Goller (who has been doing St. Andrews, after unusually long stoppage at small station): 'I say, guard, why aren't we going on? Anything wrong?' Guard (who is peacefully taking his lunch): 'There's naething wrong. But I canna whuslie the noo; my mouth's fu' o' biscuits!'"

MIRRORS FOR FISHES.—We take the following from an American contemporary: In France a novel method of catching fish is being tested by anglers. A tiny mirror is attached to the line near the baited hook. The assumption is that a fish, when it sees itself in a glass, will conclude that some other fish is trying to carry off the bait, and will make haste to secure the tempting morsel itself, the result being that it will speedily be caught on the relentless hook. From experiments which have been made, there seems to be some foundation for this assumption. At any rate, some anglers say that they catch more fish when they use the little mirror than they ever caught before.

ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE.—Try the following simple experiment if you desire to obtain a vivid idea of the force of atmospheric pressure: Place an ordinary wooden ruler on a table in such a manner that half of it will project beyond the edge of the table, and then over the table and the portion of the ruler thereon lay a smooth sheet of paper. Now, if you strike the exposed part of the ruler, it will in nine cases out of ten break in half, and yet the sheet of paper on the table will neither be raised nor moved in the slightest from its position. The simple reason is because the atmospheric pressure on the paper is more than sufficient to counterbalance the force of the blow which is struck at the ruler. By means of simple experiments like this one can learn a great deal of science.

TO BE WELL SHAKEN BEFORE TAKEN.—A hygienic journal tells "How to Take Medicine." It is about time a new method of taking medicine was introduced. Medicine is as hard to take as good advice. Castor oil, for instance: one dose taken in childhood will linger on the taste as long as life lasts. Some of the concoctions prescribed for a sick man is such a terrible aggregation of all the awful stuffs ever conceived by the ingenuity of the disciples of Æsculapius, that the patient cheerfully welcomes death after the first taste. He hopes death may arrive before the hour named for taking the second dose. Hence, fellow sufferers, the best way to take medicine is to hire a well man to take it for you, or bribe the nurse to take it, and throw it out of the window. It will "go right to the spot" all the same.

BRITAIN'S OCEAN TRAMPS.—The liners are not the British merchant navy, they are only one part of it. In fact, liners compose only one-seventh, while tramps compose six-sevenths of the total number of British steamships. This great volume of tonnage must not be ignored by either the statesman or the writer if he is to have an accurate knowledge of our mercantile greatness. Our supremacy lies in our tramp shipping. We are still predominant in liners, but it is in this class of shipping that Germany and America can most boldly attack us. In tramps we have a long lead, for, excepting the small Scandinavian fleets and a few continental firms, the world's tramp shipping is British. The peculiar quality of the tramp is that she is bound to no one route and restricted to no regular succession of ports. She goes wherever, within the limits of the ocean, there is a cargo to be carried.

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GRATEFUL—COMFORTING.

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EASILY CURE
THE WORST COUGH.**

One gives relief. An increasing sale of over 80 years is a certain test of their value. Sold in 131d. tins everywhere.

DEFECTIVE SIGHT

Many people suffer from bad sight or films and specks. All such should send to STEPHEN GREEN, 210, Lambeth Road, London, for his little book "How to Preserve the Eyesight." This tells of SINGLETON'S EYE OINTMENT, a cure for all troubles of the eyes, eyelids and eyelashes, having 300 years' reputation as the best remedy. Supplied in ancient pedestal pots for 2/- each by chemists and stores. Please note that it retains its healing virtues for years.

—FWS—

LARGEST ORCHARD IN THE WORLD.—The largest apple orchard in the world is in the Ozark Mountains, near Lebanon, Missouri. It comprises 2,300 acres of ground, and is planted sixty trees to an acre, says "The Philadelphia Press." After six years of waiting, this huge apple garden has come into full bearing, and is sending out a crop that, it is claimed, surpasses in size, quantity, and quality, any other crop of the fruit ever grown in the United States. Its value is estimated at over 1,000,000 dollars.

A CONVICT INVENTOR.—The treatment of criminals in America is very different from anything that is possible in England. The latest story is quite a romance. A man named Charles Filer, while serving a sentence of ten years in New Jersey prison, thought out a means of "blind stitching" by a machine. Blind stitching is the hidden stitching of hems in garments, which had hitherto been done by hand. The prison authorities gave him every facility for working out his ideas, and when the invention was complete and perfected he was pardoned and set at liberty. He is now well on the way to become a millionaire. On his release, a company with a capital of a million dollars was formed, and it was not long before a sum of £10,000 was paid to Filer on account of royalties. It is about to be introduced into England. The big Manchester firms have seen it, and are not only delighted with the work it can do, but are amazed at the simple expedient by which what was deemed an insuperable difficulty has been overcome.

Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

BEVYL.—I do not think I should be in a hurry about going out to South Africa. Better situations will be obtainable in a few months' time.

LILY and her sister wish to go to a fancy ball dressed as Night and Morning, and ask how they should dress to symbolise these. Night should wear a black tulle, gauze, China crepe, or tarlatan over a black silk or cambric skirt; the thin black overdress should be spangled with occasional silver stars; a silver crescent, representing the moon, is worn upon a black velvet diadem above the forehead, hair loose if black and abundant; black velvet band around the neck, or black dull beads; bodice square, sleeveless, with long black silk gloves, tied at top with black ribbon. Morning wears rose colour—some light, floating fabric, with flowing "angel" sleeves; the morning star is on the forehead—silver on a band of pale pink satin or silk; a scarf of thin rose lace or gauze is sometimes thrown about the shoulders to resemble a roseate cloud.

ALICIA.—The showers of frogs, which are often reported as taking place, are accounted for as follows:—It is generally about the month of August, and often after a season of drought, that these hordes of frogs make their appearance; the animals have been hatched and quitted their tadpole state and native pond. Finding the fields hot and parched, they seek the coolest and dampest places, and conceal themselves under clods and stones, where, on account of their dusky colour, they escape notice. When the rain descends they come forth in hundreds from their hiding-places, and hence are supposed to have fallen to the earth in a shower. As regards fishes being found on land after a severe rain storm, they are supposed to be swept out of rivers or ponds by the violence of the wind, being at the time near the surface of the water.

FREDE.—A girl can be very charming and entertaining without flirting. To flirt is to try deliberately to make a man believe you are very much in love with him. Young men are prone to think so, anyhow, and to meet a coquette half-way. When her back is turned they are apt to say of her, "She is the girl to have a bit of fun with," not that she is a nice girl they would like to have for a sister or a wife.

999.—The glaze for pottery is usually made of white clay, ground quartz, felspar, and white lead. All are ground fine and mixed with water enough to make into a milk-white liquid. Each piece is carefully dipped into the glaze, so as to cover it all over equally, and then set upon a bench. The water of the glaze soaks into the ware, leaving a thin film on the outside. The cuticles are again put into seggars and baked in a glaze kiln for about half a day, when they are cooled again slowly. The glaze is melted by this baking and spread evenly over the surface.

AVIS.—Your badly-pimpled face is an evidence that your blood is impure. You cannot dry up the pimples without producing sickness. You must get rid of them gradually by doctoring yourself. Leave off eating greasy food, eat freely of baked apples and fresh good oranges. Bathe in warm salt water, and take a seidlitz powder occasionally. Then you can begin to dry up the pimples by touching them with sulphur and fresh cream. If you live hygienically you will probably grow taller, but 5ft. 2in. is not very petite for a girl of your age. Yes, Alma is a very pretty name.

PRACTICAL.—Hard cider kept in a warm kitchen in winter and exposed to the hot sun in summer will become excellent vinegar. Another plan is to mix cider and honey, in the proportion of one pound of honey to a gallon of cider, and let it stand in a vessel for four or five months. Vinegar is rendered colourless by adding fresh-burned boneblack, six ounces to a gallon, and letting it stand for two or three days to clear. The most ordinary cider will make good table vinegar if managed as follows:—First draw off the cider into a cask that has had vinegar in it before; then put some of the apples that have been pressed into it. Set the whole in the sun, and in a week or ten days draw it off into another cask.

PADDY is troubled because his lady-love walked from church with a married man, and because her parents will not consent to their marriage. It was not wrong to walk from church with a married man if he was an old acquaintance, a neighbour, and friend. It would be wrong for her to receive lover-like attentions from a man who had a wife. You are young enough to postpone the question of marriage for a while, and meanwhile make yourself desirable as a son-in-law in the eyes of your lady-love's parents—by being industrious, steady, and obliging. A little quiet attention to the old folks has a very softening effect on their hearts.

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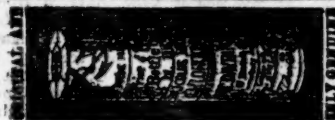
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